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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF TEACHER - STUDENT CONFLICT**

**BY
MAUREEN ELAINE OSINCHUK**



**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education**

Department of Educational Administration

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1995



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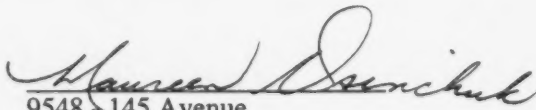
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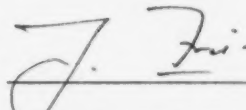

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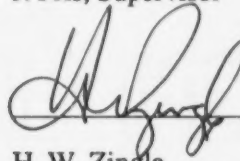
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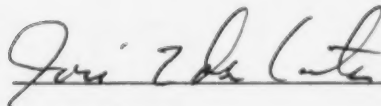
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J. Fris, Supervisor



H. W. Zingle



J. L. da Costa

Date: August 28, 1995

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine conflict between teachers and students from the perspective of junior high school students. A review of the literature revealed that most studies of conflict had been conducted in business or labor-relation fields. Most studies conducted in educational settings presented the views of adults—teachers, administrators, parents, and observers whose concerns were behavior modification or conflict management. Seldom were the views of students solicited.

A survey questionnaire was administered to 73 ninth grade students. In-depth interviews were conducted with twelve of those students. Information was gathered regarding the causes of teacher-student conflict, criteria for determining the severity of conflict, responsibility for initiation of conflict, positive and negative effects of conflict, and extent of intentional involvement in conflict. Causes of conflict identified by students were communication issues, value and fairness issues, noncompliance with rules and policies, authority issues, frustration and irritability, and substandard performance and responsibility. Initiation of conflict was attributed to students more often than teachers. Students recognized that conflict could have positive as well as negative outcomes. Both survey and interview participants stated that approximately 50 percent of student involvement in conflict with teachers was intentional.

Implications for teachers, administrators, and students focused on improving communication, and creating an environment in which conflict participants were treated in a fair and equitable manner. Additionally, it was suggested that teachers recognize and try to capitalize upon the positive outcomes of conflict.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES.....	1
Overview	1
The Problem	1
The Objectives.....	2
Definitions of Terms	3
Conflict.....	3
Perception.....	5
Resolution.....	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Pervasiveness of Conflict	7
Causes of Conflict	9
Non-educational Settings	9
Educational Settings.....	10
Outcomes of Conflict	13
Positive Outcomes.....	13
Non-educational settings	13
Educational Settings.....	14
Negative Outcomes	15
Non-educational settings	15
Educational settings.....	16
Conflict Management or Resolution	16
Non-educational Settings	16
Educational Settings.....	17
The Role of Communication in Conflict.....	20
Non-educational Settings	20
Educational Settings.....	21
The Relationship of Power, Authority, Influence, and Conflict	21
Non-educational Settings	21
Educational Settings.....	25
Conclusion.....	26
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN	28
Assumptions	28
Limitations	28
Delimitations	29
Research Instruments	29
Data Sources.....	29
Site of the Study	29
Sample.....	29
Ethical Considerations.....	30
Pilot Study	31
Data Collection.....	32
Questionnaire	32
Interviews	32
Data Analysis	33
Questionnaire	33
Interviews	34
Trustworthiness	35
Credibility.....	35
Dependability or Reliability	35

Confirmability	36
Transferability	37
CHAPTER 4: SURVEY FINDINGS	38
Demographic Data.....	38
Causes of Conflict	38
Communication Failure, Misunderstanding.....	41
Value and Fairness Issues	41
Noncompliance with Rules and Policies.....	45
Power and Authority	48
Frustration and Irritability	51
Personality Clashes	51
Student Behavior Compared to Teacher Behavior.....	52
Most Serious Types of Teacher-Student Conflict.....	54
Criteria for Establishing the Seriousness of Conflict.....	56
Initiation of Conflict.....	59
Positive Outcomes of Conflict	59
Negative Outcomes of Conflict.....	61
Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict.....	63
Teacher's Strategies	63
Students' Strategies.....	63
Intentional Involvement in Conflict.....	66
Summary	67
CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW FINDINGS.....	69
Demographic Data.....	69
Group 1—Never Referred to Principal for Conflict.....	69
Group 2—Referred to Principal Once.....	69
Group 3—Referred to Principal Twice	70
Group 4—Referred to Principal More than Twice.....	70
Causes of Conflict	71
Most Serious Types of Teacher-Student Conflict	73
Criteria for Establishing the Seriousness of Conflict.....	74
Initiation of Conflict.....	74
Intentional Involvement in Conflict	75
Critical Incident Conflict Stories.....	76
Student Misbehavior that Escalated to a Major Conflict	77
Disagreements that Escalated to Physical Confrontation.....	79
Disagreement with Teacher's Methods or Performance	80
Inappropriate Behavior of the Teacher.....	81
Students' Perceptions that Teacher Acted in an Unfair Manner.....	82
Affect as a Factor in Conflict	84
Humor, Empathy, and Respect.....	84
Teacher's Gender as a Factor in Respect and Conflict	86
Students' Lack of Influence or Power.....	88
Effectiveness of Involvement of the Principal	88
Positive Outcomes of Conflict	89
Negative Outcomes of Conflict.....	90
Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict	92
Summary	92

CHAPTER 6: SYNTHESIS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH	94
Overview of the Study.....	94
Synthesis: Relating Findings to Extant Information	94
Causes of Conflict	94
Most Serious Types of Teacher-Student Conflict	97
Initiation of Conflict.....	97
Intentional Involvement in Conflict	98
Positive Outcomes of Conflict	98
Negative Outcomes of Conflict.....	98
Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict	99
Relationship of Power, Authority, Influence, and Conflict.....	100
Recommendations	100
Implications.....	102
Implications for Practice	102
Teachers	102
Administrators.....	105
Students	106
Implications for Research.....	107
Concluding Remarks	108
REFERENCES.....	111
APPENDIX A RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS	114
Teacher - Student Conflict	115
Interview Schedule.....	117
APPENDIX B CORRESPONDENCE.....	119
APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHIC DATA	122
Table C1 Age of Survey Respondents in Years.....	123
Table C2 Respondents' Years in School.....	123
Table C3 Number of Schools Attended by Survey Respondents.....	123

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Relative Frequencies of Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents	39
Table 4.2	Relative Frequencies of Communication Issues Identified by Students as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents.....	42
Table 4.3	Relative Frequencies of Values/Fairness Issues Identified by Students as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents.....	43
Table 4.4	Relative Frequencies of Noncompliance with Rules and Policies Issues Identified by Students as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents	46
Table 4.5	Relative Frequencies of Power/Authority Issues Identified by Students as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents.....	49
Table 4.6	Frequency and Percentage of Conflict Caused by Teachers, Students, or Other Factors.....	53
Table 4.7	Relative Frequencies of Most Serious Types of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents	55
Table 4.8	Relative Frequencies of Criteria for Deciding Seriousness of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents.....	57
Table 4.9	Relative Frequencies of Positive Outcomes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents	60
Table 4.10	Relative Frequencies of Negative Outcomes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents	62
Table 4.11	Relative Frequencies of Teacher Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents	64
Table 4.12	Relative Frequencies of Student Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents.....	65
Table 5.1	Frequency and Percentage of Conflict Caused by Teachers, Students, or Other Factors Reported by Interview Respondents	72
Table 6.1	A Comparison of Causes of Conflict in the Present Study With Those Identified by Other Researchers in Educational and Non-educational Settings	95

List of Figures

Figure 1	Thomas' typology of conflict-handling strategies	18
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Overview

The relationship between students and teachers is a prime determinant of the effectiveness of the educational process. If students and teachers can establish an atmosphere of mutual respect in which learning is valued, they can better endeavor to address the problems that invariably arise in the classroom. A significant issue in this matter is the existence of conflict between students and the teacher.

Coinciding with the establishment of any organization is the inevitable emergence of conflict. The educational organization, the school, is no exception. Indeed, the school, whose mandate dictates that interpersonal relationships or interactions form the basis of its existence, is likely to be the locus of notably more conflict than organizations that have a less humanistic focus. As Margolis and Tewel (1988) state:

Because people come from different cultures, have dissimilar educational and family experiences, perform disparate roles in society, act on dissimilar information and assumptions, hold different expectations, and often have differing dominant needs, it should not be surprising that they view the world differently and voice contrary opinions. Thus, conflict is inevitable. (p. 1)

The Problem

Considerable research has been conducted on conflict—its causes, manifestations, results, and the methods to resolve or manage it. The vast majority of this research has been conducted in business settings rather than educational settings. Therefore, there is insufficient information available about conflict in educational settings. In addition, the focus of most research has been on adult participants and their perceptions and explanations. Students' views were seldom solicited. Conflict in educational institutions was described and analyzed by Blumberg and Blumberg (1985), Woodtli (1987), Holder (1991), Fris (1991, 1992), McIntosh (1992), Eiserman (1993, cited in Sekhon, 1994), and Sekhon (1994). The foci of these researchers were principals, school jurisdiction personnel, nursing education administrators, and superintendents of schools. The views

of students were not presented. When students have been included in studies of conflict, it has usually been in terms of being receivers of management techniques, or occasionally, as peer mediators, in which cases they were trained in specific techniques of conflict resolution.

Teacher-student conflict is a significant issue for many teachers because it is viewed as being disruptive to the teaching and learning process, and it is often a source of frustration and stress for both the student and the teacher.

There is insufficient information regarding students' perceptions of the causes of student-teacher conflict and the ways it can be resolved or managed. A study by Huber (1984) examined the relationship between parents', teachers' and the principal's concerns regarding student behavior as a possible source of conflict. However, pupils' views were not considered, and only student behavior was investigated, not the teacher's. Williams (1993) recognized that the student view is rarely solicited when she stated that "analyzing the data from the perspective of students provides a vantage point that is rarely encountered in classroom research" (p. 22). As students are major stakeholders in education, it is essential that their views be considered. As Martin and Baksh (1984) stated, "By neglecting the student perspective on schooling we have failed to understand a crucial aspect of the organizational structure and interaction processes of a school" (p. 158). Other researchers have also recognized the value of student perceptions. Reed and Avis (1978) stated, "Students are astute and extremely knowledgeable about school problems and their sources" (p. 36). Fuhr (1993) supported this view by saying, "Research studies consistently mention that student perceptions of classroom practices yield valid and reliable data" (p. 84). However, few studies have presented the viewpoints of students.

The Objectives

This study attempted to address the lack of information on conflict from the student perspective. In particular, the purpose of the investigation was to obtain information

concerning the research question: What are junior high school students' perceptions of teacher-student conflict?

More specific questions that constituted the sub-problems addressed in the study were:

1. What do junior high school students perceive to be the causes of conflict between students and teachers in a junior high setting?
2. Which student-teacher conflicts do junior high school students consider to be most serious?
3. What criteria do junior high school students use to determine the severity of student-teacher conflict?
4. What proportion of conflict is initiated by the student? by the teacher? by other factors?
5. What are the positive outcomes of conflict?
6. What are the negative outcomes of conflict?
7. If the outcomes of the conflict were negative, how could the conflict have been avoided by the student? by the teacher?
8. To what extent is students' involvement in conflict deliberate or unintentional?

These questions guided the study. However, the research was designed to allow for the consideration of other questions as they arose in the data.

Definitions of Terms

Conflict

Many definitions of conflict have been put forth by theorists, but for the purposes of this study the following definitions are most appropriate. Thomas (1976) defined conflict as "the process which begins when one party perceives that the other has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his" (p. 891). Thomas distinguished between the process and structural models of conflict. His process model focused upon "the sequence

of events which transpire within a conflict episode" (p. 926). Conflict is an active process which includes the "perceptions, emotions, behaviors, and outcomes of the two parties" (p. 891). Thomas described the process model of conflict as consisting of five main events within each conflict episode: frustration, conceptualization, behavior of one party, the other's reaction, and the outcome. Frustration occurred when one person was prevented from, or anticipated being prevented from, achieving one of his/her goals. Conceptualization was the result of the frustration being dealt with consciously, by the person becoming aware of the issue. Behavior, or lack of it in the cases of avoidance or withdrawal, was the person's attempt to cope with the situation. This prompted a reaction from the other person. At this stage the conflict process could continue for several interactions between the participants. When the interaction between participants ceased, an outcome occurred. This outcome might consist of an agreement, avoidance of the issue, or unresolved disagreement which could serve as input for another conflict episode. Maurer (1991) also defined conflict as a process resulting from "a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups over an issue or issues" that is a result of incompatible demands of the parties (p. xiii). Lippitt (1982) described the process of conflict as proceeding through five stages: anticipation, conscious but unexpressed difference, discussion, open dispute presenting the sides of the argument, and open conflict.

Thomas' structural model focused upon "the conditions which shape conflict behavior in a relationship" (p. 927). Owens' (1991) adaptation of Thomas' structural model suggested the following as examples of conditions: rules and procedures, the personality predispositions of people, and social norms of the organization (pp. 250-251). These would be the objective realities of the issues that affected the concerns of those involved. Maurer (1991) listed the following as conditions that may lead to conflict: ambiguous roles, conflicting interests, communication barriers (distance, time, prejudices), dependence on one party, differentiation of organization, need for consensus,

behavior regulations or rules, unresolved prior conflicts, or lack of trust, integrity, benefits, information, or clarity. The conditions or causes of conflict are also evident in the descriptions of the following theorists. Thomas suggested that "a party may be frustrated by actions ranging from intellectual disagreement to physical violence" (p. 891). Maurer stated that conflict was a process resulting from "a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups over an issue or issues" (1991, p. xiii). Johnson (1986) asserted that:

An interpersonal conflict exists whenever an action by one person prevents, obstructs, or interferes with the actions of another person. There can be conflicts between what people want to accomplish, the ways in which they wish to pursue their goals, their personal needs, and the expectations they hold for each other's behavior. (p. 199)

Although Thomas suggested that conflict could be viewed from the perspective of either the process or the structural model, he stressed that the models were interrelated and complemented each other.

The conflict referred to in the above definitions was interpersonal conflict because it occurred between people. Intrapersonal conflict within an individual is also possible, for example, when goals are incompatible, when desires are in opposition, when choices must be made between equally desirable or undesirable alternatives, or when there is a clash between obligation and the wish for freedom of choice.

Perception

Perception is the insight, awareness, or understanding of an action, object, or relationship based on data acquired through the senses. In this study, perception refers to students' thoughts and feelings concerning their relationships with teachers in conflict situations. Students' views of a situation may be very different from teachers'. De Bono (1985) described perception in similar terms, noting that exactly the same thing can be seen in different ways, even by people with the same background and motivation.

Resolution

Resolution refers to a decision as to future action reached by having the "parties work out their disagreements in order to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion" (Maurer, 1991, p. xiv). A successful resolution implies a win-win situation for the conflict participants. The concerns of both parties would be fully satisfied. Therefore, the conflict would no longer exist. Outcomes in which both participants were not fully satisfied would be categorized as conflict management strategies. Managing conflict implies handling conflicts constructively in order that the relationship between the parties is improved and they are better able to work with each other (Johnson, 1986, p. 201). The conflict continues to exist but is managed. In Thomas' model, the competition, sharing, avoidance, and accommodation orientations would be management orientations, while collaboration would be resolution (1985, pp. 900-902). Resolution was considered in very general terms in this study in the question that asked students to consider how conflict could be avoided. Some responses dealt with preventative strategies, while others presented management or resolution strategies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pervasiveness of Conflict

Where there is life, there is conflict. "Conflict is a natural occurrence that is part of a larger process of growth, development and change" (Gerstain & Reagan, 1986, p. 8). Conflict is an inevitable result of the interaction of humans. "Conflict is a pervasive human activity, . . . a normal human event that occurs in all important relationships" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 35). "Conflict is a part of life, at least as we know it. How we deal with the fact of conflict has much to do with how we express our being" (Bugenthal, cited in Mayer, 1990, p. 2). As indicated by the previous quotes, conflict is an inescapable part of the human experience. It is a common feature of relationships and organizations. "You cannot have an organization without having conflict. Not only is conflict not abnormal, it is a phenomenon whose absence would be abnormal" (Jandt & Gillette, 1985, p. 24).

If conflict is as natural and pervasive as many researchers propose, it is essential that students and teachers gain an understanding of it as it applies to their situation. Maurer (1991) stated that "conflict is part of the very structure of schools, whether they are good schools or poor ones" (p. 2). The very nature of the relationship between students and teachers includes factors which illustrate the inevitability of conflict:

1. the hierarchical structure that defines and distributes power in the educational system—school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, students, and parents.
2. prolonged, intense face-to-face interaction between students and teachers that provides abundant opportunity for communication and power problems. In their examination of interpersonal conflict, Hocker and Wilmot (1985) emphasize the communication behavior of conflict participants. They state that a "communication approach assumes conflict and communication are

intrinsically related" (p. xi). Since the essence of the student and teacher relationship involves communication, it is therefore to be expected that conflict will be a feature of their relationship. Further, "observation of people in relationships shows that conflict is not a temporary aberration. It alternates with harmony in an ebb and flow pattern" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 7).

If conflict is inevitable, as the above researchers suggest, then it should be viewed not as a failure, but as an opportunity to learn.

"Conflict presents a chance for growth, new life, and change at the same time that it affords potential destruction, death, and stagnation" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 4).

3. different value systems of teachers and students, probably more evident in areas in which there is a variety of cultures and experiences represented. As Margolis & Tewel (1988) state:

Because people come from different cultures, have dissimilar educational and family experiences, perform disparate roles in society, act on dissimilar information and assumptions, hold different expectations, and often have differing dominant needs, it should not be surprising that they view the world differently and voice contrary opinions. Thus, conflict is inevitable (p. 1).

4. historical roles—the expectations of both students and teachers that there will be some opposition to the teacher's authority. This is reinforced in the popular media. Recognizing that there are positive aspects of conflict may allow teachers and students to approach the conflict situation in a constructive rather than destructive manner.

Conflict has been studied in many disciplines; therefore, the literature that is available presents information from many viewpoints—philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, economics, as well as from the views of scholars in management, communications, and education. Although this presents some problems in reconciling differing points of view and diverse terminology, it does

reinforce the idea put forth by Rahim (1989) that "Conflict can occur in practically any organizational and social contexts, and effective management is truly an interdisciplinary task" (p. ix).

Aspects of conflict that have been the foci of studies in the literature include the nature of conflict, sources of conflict, management and resolution of conflict, negative and positive effects of conflict, and power and communication in conflict. This study examines those topics also. The definition of conflict in Chapter 1 addressed the nature of conflict. This review of the literature examines the other topics in terms of information from non-educational settings, from educational settings, and specifically relating to the teacher-student relationship.

Causes of Conflict

Non-educational Settings

The causes of interpersonal conflict have been identified and described by many authors. Deutsch (1973) reported five issues that resulted in conflict: "control over resources (for example, space, money, property, power, prestige), preferences and nuisances, values over what 'should be', beliefs over 'what is', and the nature of the relationship between the parties" (pp. 15-17). Pondy (cited in Owens, 1991, p. 248) proposed that conflict resulted from three sources—competition for scarce resources, autonomy (freedom from another's control), and goal divergence. De Bono (1985) listed these general purposes of argument: (a) to prove that someone is wrong or inconsistent, (b) to show that someone is stupid or ignorant, (c) to make an impression on others, (d) to set the emotional mood that will then become part of the negotiation scene, (e) to cast doubt on the certainty of a particular interpretation, (f) to force an exploration of the matter, and (g) to bring about an insight change of view (pp. 25-26).

Lippitt (1982) formulated his ideas concerning causes of conflict in reference to business organizations. His inclusion of psychological factors provides a focus absent from many of the studies referred to previously. Lippitt's causes of conflict include:

1. Value and goal differences
2. Misunderstanding (Communication failure)
3. Personality clashes
4. Substandard performance
5. Responsibility issues
6. Differences over methods
7. Lack of cooperation
8. Authority issues
9. Noncompliance with rules and policies
10. Frustration and irritability
11. Competition for limited resources (p. 67).

Educational Settings

Maurer (1991) described conditions in educational institutions that may lead to conflict. He included ambiguous roles, conflicting interests, communication barriers, dependence of one party on the other, differentiation of the organization, the need for consensus, behavior regulations or rules, unresolved prior conflicts, and lack of trust, integrity, benefits, information, or clarity.

Boyd (1989) examined the nature of conflict between teachers in schools. She stated that the prime determinant of whether conflict was likely to occur between or among teachers was the teacher's professional ego or identity. This sense of identity was closely related to the teacher's need for autonomy, which required a sense of control over goals, standards, methods, and decisions. Boyd also noted that there was a strong sense of territoriality related to this control:

Territoriality embraces "ownership" of the physical space of teaching activity (the classroom, the gymnasium, display bulletin boards), amount of resources allotted to a teacher, the programs comprising the teacher's area of responsibility, the materials developed by a teacher to run those programs, **and the students entrusted to the teacher.** (p. 76, emphasis added)

Conflict between teachers occurred when there was a real or perceived challenge to the personal needs associated with the professional ego, the needs being:

congruence of values; equality of status; autonomy of activity including personal movements, decisions, goals, standards, and methods; control professional territory and resources; recognition and respect; fairness in equal distribution of work and reciprocal 'giving' with the organization. (p. 78)

It appears reasonable to assume that if respect and recognition of the teacher's authority were important in relationships between teachers, that they would also be important in relationships between the teacher and students.

Hale, Farley-Lucas, and Tardy (1994) examined interpersonal conflict reported by students from second grade to high school. The students identified three themes in the causes of conflict between students: conflict as a product of the spoken word (name calling, rumors, threats), conflict as a product of nonverbal intrusions (dirty looks, kicking, hitting, pushing, spitting, actions interfering with the work of students), and conflict as a struggle for equality. The researchers noted that many of the causes of conflict were also signs that a conflict existed. They also mentioned that the absence of talk was a powerful indicator that conflict existed, that is, ignoring people and not speaking with them were indicators of interpersonal conflict.

Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Burnett (1992) surveyed elementary school students to determine the causes and/or types of conflicts in which they were involved. Students reported put-downs and teasing, playground conflicts, access and possession conflicts, physical aggression and fights, academic work conflict and turn-taking problems (p. 12).

Williams' (1993) study provided a description of the behaviors that students in Grades 6 to 8 thought model teachers should possess:

Model teachers understand that students require an environment of mutual trust and respect. They:

- present clear, consistent, and sincere messages;
- do not pull rank—are never authoritarian;
- communicate high expectations;
- really listen;
- communicate their commitment through actions;

- are hard-working and really care about student learning;
- deserve respect. (p. 22)

Presumably, there would be less conflict in the classrooms of teachers exhibiting those behaviors. A similar topic was investigated by Clark (1987) in a high school setting. He surveyed students to determine the characteristics they thought were important in teachers. The students stated that to "help students in class teachers need to be understanding, knowledgeable, and fair" (p. 504). In Clark's study students were also asked to identify teaching behaviors that sometimes created problems. Eighty-one percent of students identified "Teachers give special attention to favorite students" as a major concern (p. 505). Other teacher behaviors that were identified as being problematic were:

Teachers waste too much time on things that are not important.
 Teachers show bias in assigning grades.
 Teachers give homework that is too long or difficult to complete on time.
 Teachers seem to teach mainly for the benefit of top students.
 Teachers do not use effective teaching methods. (p. 505)

Students also perceived teachers to be more demanding and strict than they needed to be, and they rated teachers low on being interesting and creative. Although Clark and Williams did gather data from students, their requests were for information regarding teachers' behaviors. Students were not asked for their perceptions of how student behavior contributed to the conflict.

The emphasis of most material dealing with students in conflict situations is on the description of conflict management strategies or programs, rather than on exploring the sources of the conflict. Reed and Avis' (1978) description of a conflict management student leadership program is a typical example. They described very generally the causes of conflict in senior high schools:

Students are astute and extremely knowledgeable about school problems and their sources. According to the student participants, the major sources of problems and conflicts . . . are teachers, boredom, school rules, prejudice, fighting, communication, student apathy, food, and insufficient learning materials/supplies. (p. 36)

Although there is considerable material in the literature regarding student conflict in schools, very little of it deals specifically with junior high school students in conflict with teachers, which is the focus of this study.

Outcomes of Conflict

Positive Outcomes

Non-educational settings. Society's perception of conflict has changed considerably in recent years. This has implications for the manner in which conflict could be viewed from the teacher's and the student's views. The traditional view of conflict was that it was negative and, therefore, should be avoided. "For the longest time, the prevalent view of conflict within organizations was that conflict is intrinsically bad. Its presence is evidence that something is wrong within the organization. For the good of the organization, the conflict must be eliminated" (Jandt & Gillette, 1985, p. 23). However, "whereas conflict was once thought to signal a failure of the organization, it is being increasingly recognized as a normal and legitimate aspect of human social systems" (Owens, 1991, p. 258). Johnson (1986) stated that:

A lack of conflict may signal apathy and noninvolvement, not a healthy relationship. There is a growing recognition that it is the failure to handle conflict in constructive ways that leads to the destruction of relationships, not the mere occurrence of conflicts. . . . Conflicts encourage change. There are times when things need to change, when new skills need to be learned, when old habits need to be modified. (pp. 199-200)

Deutsch (1973) recognized the positive aspects of conflict as evidenced by his statement that conflict "prevents stagnation, it stimulates interest and curiosity, it is the medium through which problems can be aired and solutions arrived at, it is the root of personal and social change" (pp. 8-9). Maslow also saw conflict as a sign of health: "Conflict itself is, of course, a sign of relative health as you would know if you ever met really apathetic people, really hopeless people, people who have given up hoping, striving, and coping" (cited in Mayer, 1990, p. 14).

Thomas (1976) also presented positive aspects of conflict. It was his view that conflict stimulated interest and curiosity; therefore, some conflict was necessary and

desirable to maintain an optimal level of stimulation. Thomas also proposed that when there was a confrontation of divergent views, ideas of superior quality were often produced, those ideas being a synthesis of elements of both conflicting views. Thomas' third proposal was that aggressive conflict behavior was not necessarily irrational or destructive. It could be the instrumental, goal-oriented behavior of two largely rational parties. A fourth suggestion was that conflict was a mechanism that could draw attention to systemic problems which required change in an organization. In addition, he noted that conflict or hostility between groups could foster internal cohesiveness and unity of purpose within groups. The final positive aspect described by Thomas was that conflict provided a mechanism for determining the balance of power.

Lippitt (1982) listed eight positive values inherent in conflict:

Conflict: Opens up an issue in a confronting manner;
 Develops clarification of an issue;
 Improves problem-solving quality;
 Increases involvement;
 Provides more spontaneity in communication;
 Initiates growth;
 Strengthens a relationship when creatively resolved;
 Helps increase productivity. (pp. 68-69)

Educational Settings. Schrumpf, Crawford, and Usadel (1991) summarized the emerging view of conflict in schools: "Conflict is a normal and positive force that can accompany personal growth and social change (p. 1). Conflict is a natural, vital part of life. When conflict is truly understood, it can become an opportunity to learn and create. The synergy of conflict can create new alternatives—something that was not possible before" (p. 5). Margolis and Tewel (1988) described positive aspects of conflict in relation to administrators' relationships with parents:

Well-managed conflict helps develop creative, synergistic solutions to undesirable situations and a broadened understanding of the nature of the real problems facing people. Well-managed conflict also improves interpersonal relationships and stimulates healthy interaction, interest, and involvement in the real problem and its solution. It also increases commitment to agreed-upon solutions and heightens feelings of competence and satisfaction (p. 2). When viewed as opportunities, conflicts can improve the education of students and forge alliances. (p. 8)

Students are referred to in the foregoing description as recipients of benefits of constructive conflict between their parents and the administrator. They were not involved directly in the conflicts. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Burnett (1992) alluded to student involvement in conflict, primarily with other students, in their statement that "Conflict in the classroom in and of itself is not bad, but conflict avoided or unresolved is" (p. 13).

Negative Outcomes

Non-educational settings. The destructive nature and negative outcomes of conflict have been extensively documented, particularly by theorists of business organizations. As Tjosvold stated, "Traditional principles of management are based on the assumption that conflict disrupts and disorganizes. . . . Early influential theorists sought efficiency and rationality, and proposed designs, values, and roles that would reduce conflict and give managers the means to end it decisively" (cited in Rahim, 1982, p. 3). It was Lippitt's contention that destructive conflict:

Diverts energy from the real task;
Destroys morale;
Polarizes individuals and groups;
Deepens differences;
Obstructs cooperative action;
Produces irresponsible behavior;
Creates suspicion and distrust;
Decreases productivity. (1982, p. 68)

Janz and Tjosvold (1985) expanded on conflict's negative effects:

Conflicts can of course be highly costly. Uncontrolled conflict rips apart relationships, sabotages collective work, and devastates people. Wars, strife, strikes, and divorces confirm that escalated conflict destroys. Ill-managed conflicts cost money and hurt the bottom line. Managers and employees use their time brooding and fighting rather than working; projects are delayed; materials are wasted. (cited in Tjosvold, 1991, p. 3)

Hocker and Wilmot also commented on the negative nature and outcomes of conflict:

It is often viewed as abnormal, destructive, pathological, or related to personality clashes (p. 35). In a destructive conflict, one party unilaterally attempts to change the structure, restrict the choices of the other, and gain advantage over the other. . . . Probably the best index of destructive conflict is a situation in which one or both of the parties has a strong desire to 'get even' or damage the other party. (pp. 32-33)

Educational settings. Owens (1991, pp. 245-246) described the "devastating impact" that conflict could have on people in organizations, including educational organizations, but he included only teachers and administrators, not students. He included psychological withdrawal from the hostility of conflict (alienation, apathy, indifference), physical withdrawal (absence, tardiness, turnover), and outright hostile or aggressive behavior (job actions, property damage, minor theft) as negative responses. Margolis and Tewel (1988) stated that when an administrator was dealing with a conflict with parents, a negative outcome could be parents' anger. Furthermore, conflict:

depletes the administrator's time, resources, and emotions. . . . Avoiding conflict and related anger makes it probable that the problem will go underground and become more destructive and difficult to deal with; negative feelings will intensify and re-emerge at unexpected times; and potentially constructive solutions will be ignored. (p. 2)

Lippitt's (1982) work reinforced Margolis and Tewel's position. Lippitt reported that corporate executives and managers spent 24% of their time managing conflicts. For school and hospital administrators, mayors and city managers however, conflict was much more time consuming. These administrators estimated that they spent 49% of their time on conflict resolution (p. 67).

Schrumpf, Crawford, and Usadel (1991) referred to negative outcomes for students when they asserted that "unresolved conflicts often result in hurt feelings, loss of friends, increased anger or frustration, and sometimes physical violence" (p. 1).

Conflict Management or Resolution

Non-educational Settings

Thomas (1976) dealt extensively with responses to conflict. He proposed that conflict be viewed in a balanced manner; conflict was neither intrinsically good nor bad. The way conflict was managed determined its function. Thomas' concern with responding to conflict is evident in his statement that "with the recognition that conflict can be both useful and destructive, the emphasis has shifted from the elimination of conflict to the management of conflict" (p. 892). Thomas proposed five conflict handling

orientations which are illustrated in Figure 1. Each of the five orientations had an accompanying concern or preference:

The competitive orientation represented a desire for domination.

The sharing orientation reflected a desire for compromise.

The avoidant orientation reflected indifference.

The accommodative orientation showed a preference for appeasement.

The collaborative represented a desire that the concerns of both sides be satisfied.

It was Thomas' contention that only an agreement based on the collaborative orientation truly resolved the issue. Agreements based on the other orientations were apt to be only temporary settlements because there would be some residual frustration remaining in both parties. Other theorists such as Tjosvold (1991), Hocker and Wilmot (1985), and Owens (1991) have reached similar conclusions to Thomas', suggesting a move from trying to eliminate conflict to the management of conflict to reduce the negative effects and to capitalize on the productive possibilities.

Bies (1987, cited in Rahim, 1989) is one of the few theorists who deals with managing conflict before it has action associated with its latent or internal form. Bies suggested that conflict could be avoided if the person who recognized the potential for conflict provided accounts—explanations that channel controversies and lessen the severity of undesirable effects. He described three types of accounts that could be used, namely: (a) causal, which provide a reason for an action; (b) ideological, which contain an appeal to basic belief systems based on important shared values and goals; and (c) referential, which compare the person's position with that of someone who is in a much less desirable position.

Educational Settings

There is an abundance of information on topics obliquely related to teacher-student conflict. Many authors have addressed the issues of discipline and classroom management. However, these topics were addressed from the perspective of the adults

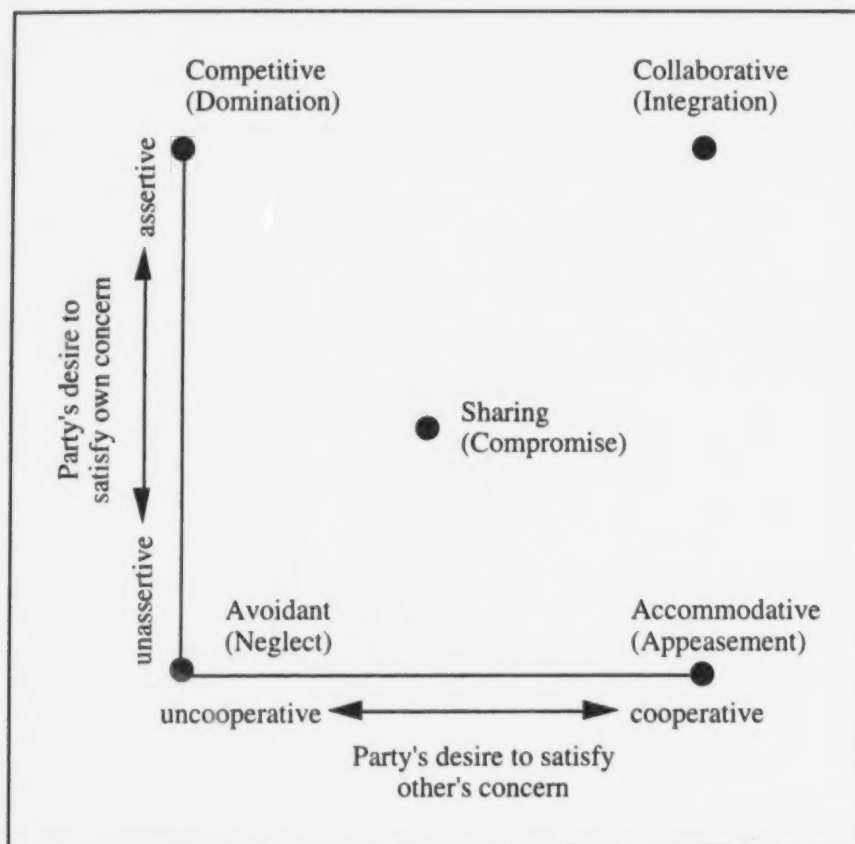


Figure 1. Thomas' typology of conflict-handling strategies. Five conflict-handling orientations, plotted according to Party's desire to satisfy own and other's concerns.

From *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* by M. Dunnette (Ed.). (1976, p. 900).

involved—teachers, administrators, parents, or outside observers. “Traditional discipline programs require an adult to monitor student behavior, determine whether it is or is not within the bounds of acceptability, and force students to terminate inappropriate behavior” (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 10). There are also many programs of peer mediation involving students which are designed to provide students with skills to deal with conflicts between their peers. There is, however, a dearth of material suggesting possible management strategies or ways to resolve teacher-student conflicts from the perspectives of students. Hale, Farley-Lucas, and Tardy’s (1994) study of students from elementary grades to high school grades did describe four common responses to conflict reported by students: (a) confrontation, (b) seeking the involvement of third parties, (c) avoidance, and (d) treating with kindness (at the elementary, not high school level). Confrontation had both positive and negative aspects, the positive being attempts to apologize or discover the source of the conflict or find a collaborative solution. The negative consisted of physical confrontations and shouting matches. The involvement of third parties consisted of seeking the assistance of friends or teachers. Typically, friends were enlisted to help a student “gang up” on another, to provide moral and physical support. The students had definite ideas concerning the involvement of teachers:

In a very few cases, intervention by a teacher was described as positive. More typically, the involvement of a teacher was described as problematic. . . . According to our middle school participants, the best efforts of teachers/administrators only fuels the intensity of the conflict. . . . Thus, at least for the participants in our focus groups, obtaining adult assistance/guidance with respect to handling an interpersonal conflict is, itself, a very conflictual situation. (Hale et al., 1994, p. 23)

The third response to conflict, avoidance or ignoring, was the most frequently mentioned approach. The acts of kindness reported by primary students appeared to be used as implicit forms of apology, or as indications that the initiator wished to continue a friendship with the person to whom the kindness was directed.

The Role of Communication in Conflict

Non-educational Settings

Communication is a key element in all interpersonal conflict. There is a relationship between conflict and communication because: "Communication behavior often creates conflict. Communication behavior reflects conflict. Communication is the vehicle for the productive or destructive management of conflict. Thus, communication and conflict are inextricably tied" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 20). Haley (cited in Hocker & Wilmot, 1985) stated that conflict is expressed through both content and relationship information in the communication process (p. 20). Content consists of facts and information, while relationship information refers to the ways participants interact with each other. Relational definitions would be communicated by "who talks first, who talks the most, nonverbal clues, eye contact," and many other factors (Wilmot, 1979, cited in Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 20).

Barnard viewed communication as one of two essential components of an organization, the other component being a common purpose. If members accepted a common purpose, cooperative activity would be produced. Communication was necessary to translate that common purpose into action. Barnard acknowledged that communication was accomplished by language, both oral and written, and by observational feeling, which he described as "the ability to understand, without words, not merely the situation but also the intention" (cited in Pugh, 1982, p. 69).

Barnard connected communication to the structure of the organization in an interesting manner. He stated that in order for a formal organization to function effectively, an informal organization had to be created and fostered as a means of communication and cohesion among members. The informal organization also served to protect the integrity of the individual against being dominated by the formal organization. It provided a sphere within which the individual was able to exercise his/her personal choice, and where his/her personality was safeguarded.

Educational Settings

The theoretical views on communication in conflict presented above are expected to apply to all organizations. Indeed, aspects of these views do seem to be applicable to classroom interactions. For instance, the student-teacher relationship in the classroom provides abundant opportunities for both content and relationship conflict, as pupils and the teacher are constantly interacting verbally and nonverbally. Through their communication, their conflicts are "recognized, expressed, experienced, and managed" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 24). There is also support for Barnard's views of the roles of language and observational feeling in the teacher-student relationship. The majority of oral communication in a classroom is directed and dominated by the teacher. Students tend to be receivers rather than initiators of oral communication. Goodlad's (1984) findings support this view. He found that only 4% of junior high school students' time was spent in discussion, while 22% was spent listening to the teacher (cited in Levin & Young, 1994, p. 273). Consequently, it appears reasonable to assume that many student responses would be of the "observational feeling" type, and that these feelings would influence the student's behavior toward the teacher. Applied to the educational organization, Barnard's informal organization would suggest that administrators and teachers should recognize the value of informal student organizations, viewing them not as threats, but as necessary structures that allow/provide for students' "continued effective contribution to the formal organization" (Barnard, cited in Pugh, 1982, p. 70). Although the connections between other organizations and educational organizations appear to be logical, it cannot be assumed that those conclusions reached in other organizations automatically apply to teacher-student conflicts.

The Relationship of Power, Authority, Influence, and Conflict

Non-educational Settings

In order for conflicts to occur, the persons involved must be interdependent. If they were totally independent, they would not have a mutual interest or an opportunity to

influence each other. They would not be able to influence or interfere with the other person's goals or rewards. One would not be able to gain an advantage over the other.

Conflict is a mutual activity, with each person's choices affecting the other's:

If people have no influence over each other, they cannot participate in conflict together, since their communication would have no impact. With no influence, persons are not in a conflict but are simply in a mutual monologue. Influence, therefore, is necessary. (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 71)

Each of the participants in a conflict is attempting to exercise communicative influence.

Power and authority have been addressed by several conflict theorists. Max Weber made a distinction between power, which he viewed as the ability to force people to obey, and authority, in which orders were voluntarily obeyed by those who received them (cited in Pugh, 1986). Hocker and Wilmot do not distinguish semantically between power and authority. However, when they assert that in the strictest sense, "power is given from one party to another in a conflict" (1985, p. 76), they seem to have in mind Weber's authority.

Carroll and Tosi examined power as the basis of compliance.

Influence is a process, a series of actions that one initiates intended to get another person to do something. When one is successful at influencing another . . . it is because power has been exercised. Power is a force which one can use to obtain compliance. (1977, p. 215)

Carroll and Tosi identified three bases of power:

1. Organizational factors of, first, formal authority derived from the position held, and second, location of a position within an organization not based on hierarchy but rather on some other source of influence such as access to key people or information.
2. Skills and expertise based on knowledge or training.
3. Personal qualities (charisma) which result in others in the group valuing the individual's characteristics and qualities and being attracted to him/her (p. 215).

Barnard's explanation of authority reversed the usual hierarchical, top down, line of communication. He stated that "the determination of authority lies with the subordinate

individual" (1962, p. 167) and "authority nevertheless rests upon the acceptance or consent of individuals" (1962, p. 164). This situation exists because the individual must accept the directive, the communication of the superior in order for its authority to be established or confirmed. The implications for the classroom situation are that the teacher would not have any real authority unless the students consented to accept his/her orders or requests. In Barnard's terms, the disobedience of a communication is a denial of the authority of the person who issued the communication.

Barnard recognized that it is not necessary for a person to occupy an executive position in order to have influence in an organization. A person's informal authority—*influence*—is based on the person's knowledge, insight, skill, and/or being informed. Tannenbaum went even further by asserting that "hierarchy is divisive, it creates resentment, hostility and opposition Paradoxically, through participation management increases its control by giving up some of its authority" (cited in Pugh, 1982, p. 61).

If Barnard's and Tannenbaum's premises are accepted, in terms of authority conflicts between students and teachers, consideration should be given to examining the hierarchical structure and opportunities for student involvement in influencing decision making. Hocker and Wilmot (1985) presented a view that has even more radical implications for the traditional situation in which the teacher holds most of the power in the classroom. They state that "productive power balancing can occur by an expansion of individual and relational power rather than by a struggle over winning a bigger part of finite power" (p. 70). Applied to the classroom, this means that teachers should not be hesitant to empower students because it would not lessen the teacher's power.

Etzioni (cited in Pugh, 1986) used the term "compliance" when considering why people in organizations conform to orders and follow prescribed standards of behavior. He stated that organizations require compliance from their members, and that compliance has two facets: (a) the structural aspect, consisting of the control structures, the

organizational power and authority which is an attempt to obtain obedience from members; and (b) the commitment of members to the aims and purposes of the organization. The higher the commitment of members, the fewer formal control mechanisms required. The more intensely members are involved in the organization, the more likely they are to work toward the organization's goals.

Three kinds of power were identified by Etzioni—coercive (force), remunerative or utilitarian (material resources), and normative (based on symbols such as love, affection, prestige). Each type was associated with a particular kind of organization. A prison was associated with coercive power, a factory with remunerative power, and a church or university with normative power. Etzioni did not classify educational institutions below the post-secondary level. He did suggest that there were three kinds of involvement, labelled alienative, calculative, and moral. Accordingly, involvement in an organization could range from highly negative to highly positive. Etzioni further suggested that a particular kind of power and a particular kind of involvement usually go together. The pairs that are congruent are: coercive power with alienative involvement, remunerative power with calculative involvement, and normative power with moral involvement. This information could be useful to educators in two ways. First, they could examine the power structure presently in existence in a particular setting and predict the type of involvement that could be expected from students and/or teachers. Secondly, they could decide the type of involvement that they would consider to be most suitable and desirable in a certain setting or situation in order to facilitate the establishment or acceptance of a certain type of power structure. Curriculum content and activities could be planned to support the chosen structure.

Etzioni proposed that stress, strain, and tension result when the compliance structures are incongruent. The implication in terms of conflict and conflict management would be that educational leaders should try to plan the involvement of students to fit the

power system (or make adjustments in the power system to take into account the desires of students).

Educational Settings

It is imperative that a satisfactory balance of power be attained between parties in a relationship, because both an excess of power and a deficiency in power will probably have negative consequences. Unequal power may build aggression, or at the very least, an attempt to get even, possibly through the use of coercion. In the school setting, "two studies have shown that if a teacher uses strong power over a student, the relationship disintegrates into the exclusive use of coercive strategies" (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974; Raven and Kruglanski, 1968; cited in Hocker & Wilmot, p. 85). Powerlessness may also be corrupting. "If lower-power persons are continually subjected to harsh treatment or no goal attainment, they will likely produce some organized resistance to the higher-powered people" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, p. 84).

Jamieson and Thomas (1974) disagreed with Hocker and Wilmot's assertion that organized resistance would result from harsh treatment. They stated that:

A number of investigators have noted that students are at a considerable disadvantage when such conflicts arise. They seldom have formal power in the educational system (Miles, 1967; Chesler & Franklin, 1968; Chesler & Lohman, 1971) largely because, in most respects, students are not considered to be members of that system. . . . With little or no formal power, students are excluded from participating in most decisions that affect their fate in the system. When students are frustrated by what is being done or said, there are few channels or forums available to them for confronting teachers and administrators. Moreover, students have much to risk by openly differing with educators, and even if differences are raised, they have little clout with which to force educators to consider their concerns seriously. (pp. 322-323)

The student, as the less powerful person, is unlikely to confront the teacher, the party with higher power. Jamieson and Thomas studied the relationship of teachers' power bases at the high school and undergraduate levels with students' satisfaction, learning, and responsiveness. They found relatively strong and consistently negative correlations of coercive power to those variables, that is, they found that "a significant portion of student dissatisfaction may be linked to the use of coercion by teachers" (1974, p. 330).

In the same study, Jamieson and Thomas also found that avoidance behavior was the conflict-handling mode employed most often by students, although this avoidance was not significantly correlated to any teacher power base. Also, students reported "somewhat less accommodation to and somewhat more competition with teachers who use more coercive power" (p. 334).

Glasser (1986) commented on power in the school setting:

If students do not feel that they have any power in their academic classes, they will not work in school. The same could also be said for teachers. There is no greater work incentive than to be able to see that your effort has a power payoff. (p. 27)

Reed and Avis (1978) provided a general description of senior high school students' concerns regarding influence and power:

Students repeatedly pointed out their feelings of frustration and powerlessness. Most frequently these feelings were associated not only with problems they encountered with teachers, school rules, prejudice, and lack of communication, but also with their inability to effect change in their school environment. (p. 28)

The traditional way of handling conflict in the classroom, whether the conflicts were between the teacher and student(s) or between students was the power play. "Teachers intervene in students' conflicts, telling them how to solve the problem rather than helping them solve the problem themselves" (Denton, cited in Scherer, 1992, p. 15). Students often have not been encouraged to take responsibility for regulating their own and their peers' behavior. They have been taught that "adults or authority figures are needed to resolve conflicts. . . . This approach does not empower students" (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 10).

Conclusion

Most of the literature available on conflict deals with the topic in a general way, often in relation to business organizations. This study will provide information that can be used to compare the situation in junior high schools with that described for other organizations and other levels of schools. The material outlining the positive aspects of

conflict may be valuable in providing a different perspective from which students and teachers may approach their differences.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

The focus of this study was students' views of conflict . While Thomas (1976) presumed that the "dynamics underlying conflict behavior in one area also characterize it in others" (p. 890), most research on conflict has been conducted in non-educational settings, and has been concerned with adult participants. Therefore, there may be important differences between data obtained from adults and that obtained from junior high school students.

Assumptions

The assumption was made that respondents responded in an honest and thorough manner. It was further assumed that respondents were able to accurately recall and describe the conflict situations that were the foci of the interviews.

Limitations

Students who were interviewed were asked to recall an incident of conflict between a teacher and a student. The findings of this study could be biased if the details provided by the students were incomplete or inaccurate. Considerable time had elapsed between the occurrence of some conflicts and the retelling, which may have affected the perceptions and recollections of students. Also, it is recognized that in each of the situations described, the perspective of only one person was presented. The views of the teachers involved, other participants, and/or observers were not solicited. The findings and conclusions might be different if those subjects had been included. There may be a further limitation related to the fact that the participants were volunteers whose parents or guardians also were required to provide signed permission for the students to participate. Students who volunteered may be different from those who chose not to volunteer. The complicating factor of obtaining written permission from both students and parents or guardians probably reduced the number of participants—a practical issue not necessarily related to the student's willingness to participate.

Delimitations

The delimitations placed on this study for the sake of manageability were that only students in grade nine were invited to be subjects of the study, and the subjects attended only one junior high school. Additionally, the questionnaire and interviews were conducted in a limited time frame—March and April, 1995.

Research Instruments

The absence of information in the research literature regarding students' views of conflict between teachers and students suggested that a survey approach would be an appropriate method to yield preliminary information. Accordingly, a cross-sectional survey was administered (Appendix A). Follow-up interviews were then conducted with twelve students in order to collect more extensive data on survey questions and to provide students' stories of conflict that represented important examples of teacher-student conflict (Appendix A).

Data Sources

Site of the Study

The site chosen for the study was a large urban junior high school in Alberta. The school had a reputation for providing a stable, well-disciplined environment for student learning. The administrators and teachers had established and communicated to students clear expectations and guidelines for behavior, and had outlined consequences for misbehavior.

Sample

The survey questionnaire was administered to 73 ninth grade students out of a total population of 198 ninth grade students. Twenty-five of the respondents were males; 48 were females. The students were members of four classes of the middle class urban junior high school. The classes were chosen on the basis of convenience rather than by random selection, because the disruption that would be caused to all of the ninth grade classes by random sampling did not make it feasible to use that procedure. The

accessible population was determined by teacher willingness to make classes available. The actual sample consisted of those students from the four accessible classes who volunteered by returning a permission form which had been signed by a parent and the student. To recruit participants, the study was explained to each class and it was requested that the students participate in order to provide a voice for students on the conflict issue. Ninth grade students were chosen because they were in their third year of junior high, and would, therefore, have had a longer time than seventh or eighth grade students in which to make the observations requested on the survey and interview. It was also assumed that the oral and written communication skills of ninth grade students would be at a higher level than those of seventh and eighth grade students, thus providing more accurate, extensive data. A final factor in choosing ninth grade students was that by the time the results of this study would be available, the students would no longer be in junior high. This eliminated any possibility of their being questioned or challenged on their responses by teachers who had read the study.

The subjects for the interviews were twelve students, seven female and five male, who had participated in the survey, and had indicated their willingness to be interviewed by indicating this on a class list at the time of the administration of the questionnaire. Students who were willing to be interviewed were assigned to one of four categories based on the number of times they had been referred to the principal for conflict with a teacher. Three names were then randomly drawn from each of the lists of available interviewees.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles for the conduct of research activities with human participants outlined by the American Psychological Association were addressed in this study (Borg and Gall, 1989, pp. 84-86). The issue of informed consent was particularly sensitive, because the subjects were underage. Therefore, the following procedure was followed:

- (a) Written permission was obtained from both the student and a parent or guardian for the student's involvement in both the survey and the interview.
- (b) The purpose of the study was explained orally twice, once during the introduction to the project, and again immediately preceding the administration of the survey questionnaire.
- (c) Students were assured that their responses would be kept confidential, and that results of the study would be presented primarily in terms of group responses, in order that individual anonymity could be maintained. Any quotations in the interviews that could identify either a teacher or student were deleted or disguised.
- (d) The students were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time, including after the completion of both the interview and survey.
- (e) Transcripts of the interviews were made available to the interviewees in order that they could verify the accuracy of those documents.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in which the survey questionnaire was administered to 55 eighth grade students, and two students were interviewed. The purpose of the pilot study was to investigate:

1. the effectiveness of the survey questionnaire and the interview schedule in terms of students being able to understand the directions and questions,
2. my interviewing skills,
3. the process of obtaining permission from students and parents,
4. the quality of data obtained from open-ended questions on the questionnaire and the critical incident description in the interviews, and
5. my skill in analyzing data using an open coding approach.

Information derived from the pilot study and from feedback from participants resulted in minor revisions being made to the questionnaire in order to avoid duplication

of information. The interview questionnaire was expanded in order to provide more detailed responses. Analysis of interview data also revealed a need for the interviewer to be better prepared to ask more probing questions spontaneously, based on the direction taken by the interviewees. The process of obtaining student and parental permission proved to be workable. The process of analyzing the data using an open coding approach was useful in providing a flexible structure and process to use in the actual study. Initial examination of data indicated there could be a considerable difference between responses from males and from females. Accordingly, data from both the pilot and the actual study were analyzed and presented separately by gender as well as in combined form. Data from the pilot were not used directly in the study, although results from it did influence the direction taken.

Data Collection

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered in the regular classroom setting of the students. The classroom teacher was not present. The survey questionnaire was composed of a combination of closed and open form questions that corresponded to the research subproblems. An opportunity was also provided at the end of the questionnaire for students to comment on any aspect of conflict that they wished. Prior to administering the survey, the purpose of the survey was explained and the term "conflict" was discussed in very general terms. The purpose of this discussion was to alert the students to the range of meanings of the term and to establish a common vocabulary. The intent was to expand, rather than limit, the students' responses. The possible threat to internal validity by the interaction of the discussion and the responses of the students was minimized by limiting the discussion to very general terms.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted at a time convenient to the students and their teachers. Some of the interviews were conducted during class time, while others were

conducted during the lunch hour or after school. The setting for the interviews was a resource room that provided for a relatively quiet, uninterrupted, and relaxed interview. Demographic data were collected at the beginning of each interview and recorded on the same sheet on which the field notes were recorded after each interview. Many of the questions paralleled the questions on the survey. However, interviewed students were asked to expand their replies. In addition, each interviewee had previously been requested to think of a critical incident in terms of teacher-student conflict, an incident in which he/she had been involved or had observed. During the interview, the respondents were asked to describe that incident, then analyze it in terms of causes, positive and negative outcomes, desirability of avoiding it, and ways of avoiding it. Students were also asked about the types of actions that escalate teacher-student conflict.

The interviews were audio-taped, and transcribed verbatim with the exception of "uh", and "um" types of pauses. These words were left intact if I thought they were meaningful, that is, necessary to ascertain the intended meaning of the interviewee. The interviews lasted an average of approximately 25 minutes.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire

Demographic data were presented in frequency tables. Data from closed form questions were presented as relative frequencies (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 528) in percentage form to facilitate comparisons. This format of presenting the responses as a percentage of the total responses by each gender was necessitated by the unequal number of males and females in the sample. The proportional underrepresentation of males compared to their representation in the school population is the result of males' failure to return the permission forms by the specified deadline. Several males stated that they wanted to participate in the survey and that their parents had signed the form, but they had forgotten the form at home.

For each of the open form questions, all responses were read before any categorizing was attempted. Because preliminary examination indicated that there might be substantial differences between males' and females' perceptions of aspects of conflict, the data were presented by gender as well as by total response. However, it is important to note that the division by gender represents only students' perceptions, but does not indicate the gender of the person whose behavior was described. The issue of gender differences emerged as the data were analyzed. It was not addressed by a direct research question and was, accordingly, not a deliberate focus of attention.

For each of the open form responses, every response was listed, then responses were examined and grouped into categories based on their similarities. For example, when dealing with the causes of conflict, the responses were grouped into broad categories, and only then compared with the models of causes of conflict described in the literature. Lippitt's model (p. 67) appeared to be most congruent, and therefore, useful, in analyzing the responses. Accordingly, students' responses were matched with Lippitt's categories. Because Lippitt's categories were quite general, it was possible to include all student responses which had been mentioned at least twice. After students' responses to the open form questions were combined into categories, the results were presented in frequency tables.

The data were analyzed in this manner to allow the categories to emerge from the responses, rather than using a deductive approach of choosing a model of conflict and attempting to place the responses into pre-determined categories. Using an inductive approach also meant that there was more opportunity to choose a model which was quite congruent with the categories that emerged. If the model had been chosen before initial analysis, it would have been chosen intuitively, not based on information from the study.

Interviews

Content analysis was employed on the transcribed interviews, with themes being the unit of analysis. The process of open coding was utilized in identifying pertinent

information in the interviews. Responses were color-coded to differentiate between references to students and to teachers. As with the open form survey responses, after all the themes had been identified, the themes were consolidated into categories based on commonalities of data. This process was utilized in analyzing the causes of teacher-student conflict, the type of conflict students considered to be most serious, the outcomes of the conflict, the ways conflict could be avoided, and the ways in which teacher-student conflict was escalated. Examination of the data in the coding frames revealed that interviewed students' responses were quite congruent with responses on the questionnaire. Therefore, similar categories were used in examining the data. The data from the interviews were then compared with the results obtained from the questionnaire.

Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability must be considered in establishing the trustworthiness of a study.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was enhanced by asking interview respondents if paraphrased interpretations were accurate. Because students were recalling incidents of conflict that may have occurred a considerable time in the past, there may be discrepancies between what actually occurred and what they remembered.

Dependability

Dependability was addressed by having an independent coder classify student responses on the survey questionnaire in order to determine consistency of coding. As Berg (1995) stated,

Using two or more independent coders ensures that naturally arising categories are used rather than those a particular researcher might hope to locate—regardless of whether the categories really exist. The consequence of this process, if correctly executed, is a precise, reliable, and reproducible coding system. (p. 60)

Auditability is the term used more often than reliability in reference to qualitative studies. Sandelowsky (1986) pointed out that,

A study and its findings are auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail used by the investigator in the study. In addition, another researcher could arrive at the same or comparable but not contradictory conclusions given the researcher's data, perspective and situation. (cited in Sekhon, 1994, p. 107)

The independent coder in this study identified and labelled two of three categories exactly as I had done. For the third category, the label was different, but both categories dealt with the same theme—fairness, misplaced blame, and unequal treatment. After discussing the issue, the independent coder decided my label was acceptable. The one major difference of opinion concerned the placement of “yelling”. The independent coder had considered it to be a primary cause of conflict, and had categorized it accordingly. I viewed it to be a reaction to a conflict between a student and teacher, and recognized that it could cause escalation of the conflict. Accordingly, I decided to leave it in the “communication” category.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to objectivity, neutrality, or freedom from bias. This is problematic in qualitative research. As Sandelowsky (1986) stated:

From the perspective of qualitative inquiry, scientific objectivity is itself a socially constructed phenomenon that produces the illusion of objectivity. No rules or protocol can change the fact that there is no way to study a thing without changing it. Any study and its findings are at least as much a reflection of the investigator as of the phenomenon studied. . . . Confirmability, as the criterion of neutrality in qualitative research, refers to the findings themselves, not to the subjective or objective stance of the researcher. (cited in Sekhon, 1994, p. 108)

Researcher bias or influence was reduced by incorporating suggestions from respondents on the pilot questionnaire. Also, many verbatim quotations from students provided first-hand evidence for readers. Data saturation, especially in reference to the questionnaire, was an indication that students' views had been presented in sufficient detail.

Transferability

Transferability or generalizability was considered in terms of Schofield's view:

A consensus appears to be emerging that for qualitative researchers generalizability is best thought of as a matter of "fit" between the situation studied and others to which one might be interested in applying the concepts and conclusions of that study. (cited in Sekhon, 1994, p. 104)

Within the framework of the above description, this study may have some transferability to other junior high settings, despite the non-random sampling technique employed.

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY FINDINGS

Demographic Data

The demographic characteristics of the subjects in the study are presented in Appendix C. The ages of the respondents were typical for ninth grade students, the average being 14.3 years. Only four respondents were somewhat atypical—two were thirteen years of age, and two were sixteen years of age.

Sixty of the seventy-three respondents had moved through the grades from kindergarten to ninth grade one year per grade. Five students had either been accelerated a year or, more likely, had not attended kindergarten; therefore, they had attended school for only nine years. Seven students had repeated one grade, and one student had repeated twice.

An examination of the number of schools attended by respondents revealed quite a stable situation. Fifty-eight percent of the students attended the same school for their entire elementary career, while eighty-two percent had stayed at the same junior high school for the entire three years. Because of the high percentage of students who had attended the same junior high school for three years, the reports on conflict should accurately reflect the situation at the school studied, rather than being a compilation of reflections from many schools. The fact that responses were provided by students who had experienced quite a stable school life, in that they had not attended a great many schools, must be taken into consideration when generalizing to other situations.

Causes of Conflict

Table 4.1 presents the findings in a model modified from Lippitt's. The results are presented in percentage form, with each percentage representing the portion of total responses that were attributed to that category by either male or female respondents. This format was chosen instead of a simple frequency table because it allowed for easier comparison of responses by gender, as there were considerably more female respondents

Table 4.1

Relative Frequencies of Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents

Causes of Conflict	Males		Females		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Communication failure, misunderstanding	21	22.1	55	23.0	76	22.8
2. Value & fairness issues	18	18.9	38	15.9	56	16.8
3. Noncompliance with rules & policies, lack of cooperation	16	16.8	40	16.7	56	16.8
4. Authority issues	15	15.8	36	15.1	51	15.3
5. Frustration & irritability	5	5.3	32	13.4	37	11.1
6. Substandard performance, responsibility issues	8	8.4	16	6.7	24	7.2
7. Differences over methods	6	6.3	7	2.9	13	3.9
8. Personality issues	2	2.1	8	3.3	10	3.0
9. Other (unclassified, single causes)	4	4.2	3	1.3	7	2.1
10. Inappropriate behavior, harassment	0	0	4	1.7	4	1.2
**Total	95	99.9	239	100.0	334	100.2

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents.

**totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

than male respondents. It provided a more distinct picture of the factors considered to be significant by each gender. After consultation with a programmer/analyst, I arbitrarily set a difference of 10% between the genders as being meaningful, and therefore, worthy of mention.

Lippitt's model of the causes of conflict proved to be very useful and appropriate in classifying the responses of students. Initially, the model was utilized in its original form. However, as data analysis proceeded, it became apparent that several modifications were required. First, the category "Competition for Limited Resources" was not required because there were no responses assigned to it. Second, the categories "Substandard Performance" and "Responsibility Issues" were combined into one category because they appeared to refer to similar behaviors for different groups, that is, substandard performance was used when students referred to teachers' behaviors such as failure to assist students when requested to do so, and responsibility issues referred most often to students' failure to do assigned work in class or as homework. Therefore, both categories referred to the failure of a person to perform the duties associated with a certain role. The third modification was the combining of the categories "Lack of cooperation" and "Noncompliance with Rules and Policies". Very few respondents referred specifically to "cooperation". It appeared that students associated cooperation with following the guidelines, rules, and policies established for individual classes and the school population in general. The last change was the addition of a category "Inappropriate behavior, harassment" which was deemed necessary because the particular behaviors mentioned did not appear to fit into any other category.

The five main causes of conflict between teachers and students that emerged from the data in descending order of frequency were:

1. Communication failure, misunderstanding,
2. Value and fairness issues,
3. Noncompliance with rules and policies, including lack of cooperation,

4. Authority issues, and
5. Frustration and irritability.

There were no differences between males' and females' responses that met the level of significance. The causes listed above represent broad ranges of behaviors. Accordingly, responses within each category were examined and subcategories were formulated.

Communication Failure, Misunderstanding

Table 4.2 presents the issues that were identified under "Communication failure, misunderstanding". The data indicate that students registered, in terms of teachers' behaviors, failure to listen, failure to allow others to respond, yelling, and general lack of understanding approximately equal percentages. However, in terms of student behavior, failure to listen was mentioned considerably more often than other causes, with yelling being a distant second. Typical student comments were:

- *Teachers don't let you voice your opinion.*
- *Teachers won't take time to listen to the student's side of the story.*
- *Teachers don't take the time to hear us out. Sometimes they ignore our statement just because they feel we have no opinions, or are disobedient. Some feel we are too young to have a say in issues.*
- *When a student tries to tell his/her story to the teacher, the teacher says, "To the principal's office you go," but I think they should learn to listen.*
- *Students don't let the teachers explain their decisions of a situation.*

A considerably higher percentage of males' responses than females' responses attributed communication problems to the teacher's and student's yelling, and to failure to allow students to express opinions.

Value and Fairness Issues

Specific student concerns regarding values or fairness issues are presented in Table 4.3. Students thought that the teacher's blaming innocent students or whole classes, and jumping to conclusions were the factors most frequently causing conflict, and their

Table 4.2

Relative Frequencies of Communication Issues Identified by Students
as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents

	Teacher Behaviors % of Responses			Student Behaviors % of responses			Total
	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Failure to listen to others	20.0	29.0	26.1	66.7	60.9	62.1	40.8
Yelling	33.3	19.4	23.9	33.3	21.7	24.1	23.7
General lack of understanding	13.3	35.5	28.3	0	13.0	10.3	21.1
Failure to allow other to state opinion, ask question(s), state reasons	33.3	16.1	21.7	0	4.3	3.4	14.5
*Total	99.9	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.1

*Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

Table 4.3

Relative Frequencies of Values/Fairness Issues Identified by Students
as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents

	Teacher Behaviors % of responses			Student Behaviors % of responses			Total
	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Blames innocent party, jumps to conclusions	30.8	36.1	34.7	25.0	50.0	37.5	36.2
Is mean	23.1	30.5	28.6	0	25.0	12.5	25.9
General	23.1	16.7	18.4	75.0	25.0	50.0	22.4
Treats others unequally	23.1	16.7	18.4	0	0	0	15.5
*Total	100.1	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

comments in this section and in the open-ended comment section at the end of the survey illustrated their feelings about this issue:

- *Teachers might blame you for something you didn't do.*
- *They blame the wrong student for something.*
- *They always jump to conclusions. Never let a student explain themselves.*
- *Mad at one class, takes it out on another.*

Respondents also recognized that students could also exhibit unfair behavior and cause conflict:

- *When one of the students falsely accuses the teacher for doing something.*
- *Students know it's their fault but they blame it on the teacher.*

The quality of meanness was almost exclusively attributed to teachers. Students often mentioned that teachers exhibited meanness by picking on a certain student. They seemed especially concerned when they perceived that teachers were being mean to a student of limited academic ability, as in:

- *Teachers act mean to students that might have a learning disability.*
- *Teachers pick on certain people all the time.*
- *They can be harsh towards a certain student or students because they don't understand.*
- *They are rude at times and make negative comments toward a student.*

Meanness as a student attribute was described as:

- *Students pick on teachers because they are new to the school.*

"Treating others unequally" was attributed solely to teachers and principals. Males more often than females placed this responsibility on teachers. Students disliked situations in which:

- *Some teachers are playing favorites.*
- *They seem to be treating students differently. If they are nicer to the smarter students it gets the slower students mad.*
- *The teacher is unfair and has class pets and picks on other students all the time.*

This student spoke for many when she stated:

- *I think teachers should be a little more fair to every student in his/her class. They should give everyone an equal chance.*

Students also disliked being treated differently from the teachers when a teacher-student conflict came before the principal, as in:

- *When there is a conflict the student gets all the blame while the teacher just sits there, or leaves the room.*
- *It's not fair. Most conflicts [a specific teacher] is part of, he/she is a big part of. But we as students get suspended and nothing happens to him/her.*
- *I find that the teacher is always considered to be right, and if a 3rd party is brought in they always listen to what the teacher has to say and tell the student they have heard enough.*

Finally, the issue of stereotyping arose. One student stated that:

- *I wish that the teachers who put labels on students like, "All teenagers are bad," for example, would stop. Some stereotype us by saying we're too young to do things on our own, we shouldn't be allowed to have a say in something, or that we all cause trouble, and it's always our fault. Half the time they think we're lying.*

Because there was only a small number of responses describing student behavior, I chose not to attribute significance to the differences between males and females.

Differences between males' and females' responses regarding teachers' behaviors did not reach the established level of significance.

Noncompliance with Rules and Policies

Noncompliance with rules and policies, including lack of cooperation, was the third most frequently mentioned cause of conflict. Table 4.4 summarizes the sub-categories identified in this issue. Because of the small number of responses, 48 in total, divisions were not made for teacher, student, or other behaviors. There was an important difference between the responses by males and females in the use of inappropriate or profane language, with males mentioning it 23 percent of the time and females only 6 percent of the time. Females mentioned general noncompliance in 40 percent of their responses, while males mentioned it only 8 percent of the time. It should be noted that students did not report any instances of teachers not complying with rules and policies. It was only students who were reported to break the rules. Perhaps that is because students perceived that it was the teachers who formulated the rules; therefore, they would be unlikely to break them.

Table 4.4

Relative Frequencies of Noncompliance with Rules and Policies Issues Identified
by Students as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents

	% of Responses by males	% of Responses by females	Total
Disruptive, attention-seeking behavior	46.2	42.9	43.8
General, vague noncompliance	7.7	40.0	31.3
Talking out in class	15.4	11.4	12.5
Inappropriate language, profanity	23.1	5.7	10.4
Fighting	7.7	0	2.1
*Total	100.1	100.0	100.1

*Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

The following comments by students illustrate the types of behaviors that they considered to be disruptive, attention-seeking behavior:

- *They might want to show off in front of the other students by arguing with the teacher.*
- *Student shows off or just wants to be the class clown.*
- *Students just need attention.*
- *Students are always fooling around making the teacher's work harder.*
- *Student does idiotic things to get attention.*
- *Students want to show how cool they are and cause trouble in class, causing the teacher to give a punishment.*
- *When a student continually interrupts a class.*
- *Most of the time students intentionally start conflicts. They do not behave or follow guidelines that the teachers give them. Sometimes if the teacher has strict guidelines, some people want to test a teacher's limits by trying to be different/get people to look up to them.*
- *Some students love to make trouble to be the joker of the class and I think these people should be dealt with in a more serious manner.*

Students' comments on talking out in class were very straightforward and predictable:

- *Conflict is caused by talking too much, being noisy.*
- *Students talk while the teacher is trying to teach a class. Then the teacher says something and they start to fight.*

Only two students mentioned actual physical fighting on this section of the survey.

One stated that conflict would occur:

- *When a student starts a fight in class.*

The second student reported:

- *I wish I could hit teachers that make me mad but I never would.*

Inappropriate language or profanity was described thus:

- *Say something students are not allowed to say.*
- *Some students say bad stuff or put down the teacher . . .*
- *Students scream and swear at teachers.*

Just as there are often many general rules and guidelines in a school, there were many comments of a general nature regarding noncompliance:

- *Don't follow instructions.*
- *Doing other subjects during your other subject's timetable.*
- *If a student isn't on time for a class.*
- *If a student is skipping.*
- *Disobedience.*

One student offered this advice to her classmates:

- *You should know how to act around different teachers because different teachers have different standards.*

Power and Authority

Power and authority issues were distinguished from noncompliance with rules and policies by the challenge to the person or, indirectly, to the position held by that person. The behavior was more personal and directed, as opposed to simply ignoring a rule. Because of the personal dimension of this issue, respect (or disrespect) was included in this category.

This area was the one in which the issue of intentional involvement arose most often. It seemed apparent that "talking back", "being disrespectful", and "deliberately trying to provoke the teacher's anger" could hardly be considered to be embarked upon accidentally.

The first subcategory under "Power/Authority Issues" (Table 4.5), the deliberate effort to provoke the teacher's anger, was described by students in the following ways:

- *Behaving in a childish way to make the teacher mad.*
- *Students are sometimes too ignorant. I was being smart and a teacher told me to get out. Then I told him to go somewhere and how to get there.*
- *Trying to aggravate the teacher.*
- *When they get mad at a teacher for something they get revenge by doing inappropriate things.*
- *Do things on purpose like: talk more than usual, throw things around and bug others when they are working.*

Students described "talking back" as:

- *Being rude. Being mouthy.*
- *Being really rude while answering questions.*
- *Kids can be mouthy and get out of hand in class.*
- *The student tells the teacher off.*

"Being disrespectful" was placed in the same category as "talking back, being lippy" because most of the disrespect that was described had been expressed verbally. Instances of both teacher and student behavior were described as being disrespectful:

- *I think respect has a lot to do with these conflicts.*
- *I think that teachers should have more respect for students if they want students to respect them.*

Table 4.5

Relative Frequencies of Power/Authority Issues Identified by Students
as Causes of Conflict Reported by Gender of Respondents

Causes of Conflict	% of Responses by Males	% of Responses by Females	Total
Deliberate effort to provoke teacher's anger	40.0	11.4	20.0
Talking back, being "lippy", being disrespectful	26.7	62.9	52.0
Teacher abusing power	26.7	20.0	22.0
Teacher having insufficient power	6.7	5.7	6.0
*Total	100.1	100.0	100.0

*Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

Students' comments were more detailed when it came to discussing abuses of power. They did not limit themselves to the succinct phrases common to previously discussed issues. Students viewed conflict as resulting from teachers' exercising either too much or too little power or authority. When teachers exerted an excess of power, the power was abused by overcontrolling students and refusing to consider that the teacher's way was not the only way. Comments by students supporting this view are:

- *The teacher wants to show how much power they have over the class and if a student does one thing the teacher is so strict he gets you in trouble.*
- *Teachers have complete control and sometimes take advantage of it which can make a student act inappropriately.*
- *Think their way is always the right way.*
- *Some teachers think they're always right, 'cause they're the teacher you can't talk back to them.*
- *I hate it when teachers are talking and they think they are right but they are really wrong, . . . , and if you say how you feel or what you think you get into trouble.*
- *Sometimes [the teacher] is wrong but still thinks they're right.*
- *Think they're always right—they never misplaced work.*
- *If they are strict and don't let anything sink into their head, stubborn.*
- *When they think they know better and in some cases they do but they don't realize when they are not right.*

Teachers' having too little power was also seen as problematic and a cause of teacher-student conflict, as the following comments indicate:

- *Lets the class get out of control and then can't regain it.*
- *Doesn't take control of class.*
- *Lose control of the class, threaten to send you down to the office.*

There appear to be substantial differences in the emphasis placed on aspects of power or authority by males compared to females. Descriptions by males were far more likely to be found in the section "Deliberate effort to provoke the teacher's anger", while females' responses were more likely to be found in the "talking back, being disrespectful" category.

When students were identifying "Other" factors that were causes of conflict in any of the categories, most of the examples involved people other than the student and teacher directly involved. It appears appropriate, therefore, to consider these "Other" factors as the "external factors" described by Owens (1991, p. 249). External factors affect the

structure of a conflict, while interpersonal dynamics affect the process of a conflict.

Examples were:

- *Other students influence some students to do bad things.*
- *Others get involved by getting into other's business. For example, your mother.*
- *Other students get involved when they aren't part of the conversation.*
- *Outside influences, like other kids from different schools can change opinions.*
- *Family, friends, etc.*
- *It could start at home with the student, then he or she will take these problems out in school.*

Frustration and Irritability

A number of students listed "frustration and irritability" as a cause of conflict.

Included in this category were factors such as being in a bad mood, having problems from outside school affect behavior within school, and having a bad attitude. Students included the following in this category:

- *Bad day and nothing seems to be going your way.*
- *Problems at home or couldn't get things done and teacher doesn't listen.*
- *Short fuses.*
- *Sometimes they should have more control over temper. If they are having a bad day they tend to take it out on the students.*
- *A lot of teachers bring their problems to school with them. They start yelling at us for barely no reason.*
- *Short tolerance/temper.*

Most of the students' comments or descriptions in this category were quite individualistic; therefore, I was not able to create subcategories. The difference between males' and females' responses was not significant.

Personality Clashes

In the general comments section of the questionnaire, several students commented on personality differences between teachers and students. Although these comments comprised only a small percentage of the total, some of them are included here as interesting observations:

- *I think it very much depends on the personalities of the teacher and student and the circumstances.*
- *Sometimes teachers blow the tiniest thing out of proportion. Especially when they are in a bad mood.*
- *I have no idea why some students hate teachers. Usually it's these students who start the whole thing. Is it because the teacher represents authority, is it because they resent the work they have to do, were they never disciplined as a child, do*

they hate their parents and since teachers are like the parents, they hate teachers. Student-teacher conflict will probably never be solved. [This student completed all sections of the questionnaire in a similarly articulate manner. He appeared to take the perspective of an adult. Most of his comments attributed responsibility for conflict and subsequent negative outcomes to students. As he did not volunteer to be interviewed, his opinions could not be explored further.]

Student Behavior Compared to Teacher Behavior

Table 4.6 is an expanded version of Table 4.1, illustrating respondents' assignments of conflict causes. The five most common factors causing conflict between teachers and students that were described above represented composite totals of students and teachers behaviors. However, there were clear differences in the attribution of specific causes in terms of originator of the conflict. In terms of teachers' behaviors, the following were identified most often:

1. Value and fairness issues,
2. Communication failure, misunderstanding, (Equal to Number 1),
3. Frustration and irritability,
4. Authority issues, and
5. Substandard performance, responsibility issues.

All other causes were identified less than 5% of the time. In terms of students' behavior, the following were mentioned most often:

1. Noncompliance with rules and policies,
2. Authority issues,
3. Communication failure, misunderstanding, and
4. Frustration and irritability.

All other causes were identified less than 6% of the time. The areas common to both teachers and students would be areas of mutual concern; however, both groups have areas of concern that are more specific to them, and those would be the areas that would receive emphasis when either teachers or students were examining their behavior to identify causes or try to avoid conflict. Therefore, teachers would focus on values and

Table 4.6
Frequency and Percentage of Conflict Caused by Teachers, Students, or Other Factors

Causes of Conflict	Teacher's Behaviors			Student's Behaviors			Other Factors		
	Male n	Female n	Total %	Male n	Female n	Total %	Male n	Female n	Total %
1. Communication failure, misunderstanding	15	31	27.9	46	23	19.5	0	1	5.9
2. Value & goal differences	13	33	29.7	46	5	4.2	1	0	5.9
3. Noncompliance with rules & policies, lack of cooperation	0	1	0.9	1	36	30.5	2	3	29.4
4. Authority issues	5	9	8.1	14	26	22.0	0	1	5.9
5. Frustration & irritability	3	20	18.0	23	10	8.5	1	2	17.6
6. Substandard performance, responsibility issues	4	9	8.1	13	6	5.1	1	1	11.8
7. Differences over methods	5	2	1.8	7	4	3.4	1	1	11.8
8. Personality issues	1	1	0.9	2	7	5.9	0	0	0
9. Other (unclassified, single causes)	2	1	0.9	3	1	0.8	1	1	11.8
10. Inappropriate behavior, harassment	0	4	3.6	4	0	0	0	0	0
**Total	48	111	99.9	159	118	99.9	7	10	100.1

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents

**totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

fairness issues, and substandard performance, while students would consider rules and policies issues. The reference to values and fairness issues for teachers, and rules and policies issues for students may not be as discrete or independent as they first appear. They may be linked, in that if students view teachers as being unfair, the students may deliberately choose to ignore or disobey rules and policies. If this were so, it would underscore the critical importance of the values and fairness issues for teachers, because the student behavior mentioned most often as a cause of conflict would be related to the teacher's fairness.

Most Serious Types of Teacher-Student Conflict

Table 4.7, which presents students' responses to identifying the types of conflicts that they considered to be most serious, yielded an interesting result. Two categories of responses emerged that had not been emphasized in the responses to the general causes of teacher-student conflict. These two categories were violence, and suspension or expulsion. Suspension and expulsion were mentioned as negative consequences of conflict. In this section, students used the seriousness of the consequence to decide the importance of the conflict. It is possible that violence had not been mentioned often because it had not been observed often. However, students recognized its potential as a serious type of conflict.

The five kinds of conflict that emerged as being most serious were:

1. Authority issues,
2. Violence,
3. Communication failure, misunderstanding,
4. Noncompliance with rules and policies, and
5. Values and fairness issues.

These five are listed in descending order of frequency; however, they were rated very closely, the range being only from 19% to 12%. Violence, of course, is an extreme

Table 4.7

Relative Frequencies of Most Serious Types of Conflict
Reported by Gender of Respondents

Causes of Conflict	Males		Females		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Authority issues	8	21.1	13	18.1	21	19.1
2. Violence	12	31.6	9	12.5	21	19.1
3. Communication failure, misunderstanding	7	18.4	13	18.1	20	18.2
4. Noncompliance with rules & policies, lack of cooperation	4	10.5	13	18.1	17	15.5
5. Value & fairness issues	3	7.9	10	13.9	13	11.8
6. Suspension or expulsion	1	2.6	5	6.9	6	5.5
7. Substandard performance, responsibility issues	1	2.6	2	2.8	3	2.7
8. Personality clashes	0	0	2	2.8	2	1.8
9. Differences over methods	1	2.6	1	1.4	2	1.8
10. Frustration & irritability harassment	1	2.6	1	1.4	2	1.8
11. Other (unclassified, single causes)	0	0	3	4.2	3	2.7
**Total	38	99.9	72	100.2	110	100.0

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents.

**totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

manifestation of conflict. With the other four types of conflict, the examples provided by the students also tended to be extreme in nature, as exemplified by these descriptions:

- *When both sides just keep arguing and arguing without listening to one another.*
- *When a student continually interrupts a class.*
- *When the teachers as well as students yell at the top of their lungs at each other.*
- *Violent conflict, physical or verbal.*
- *The teacher pushing or bullying the student around, then a fight occurs.*
- *Physical conflict, like if a teacher loses his temper and grabs the kid.*
- *When a student blows up and just leaves the classroom slamming the door.*
- *When a student is really upset at a teacher and decides to either swear at the teacher or maybe even hit the teacher.*
- *When the student is going to get into a serious amount of trouble for something that they didn't do or is partially responsible.*

The question on the survey concerning most serious types of conflict did not ask students to differentiate between teacher or student behaviors. Therefore, the data have been presented only in terms of gender of the respondents, not by perceived initiator of conflict.

Male respondents reported violence to be the most serious type of conflict considerably more often than did female respondents. Other responses did not differ meaningfully by gender.

Criteria for Establishing the Seriousness of Conflict

One survey question asked students the criteria they used in determining which conflicts were serious. Did they determine a conflict's seriousness by judging it against values they held? Were there degrees of seriousness of some types of behavior? Table 4.8 summarizes the data for determining seriousness. Seven patterns or categories of responses were noted. The most influential factors reported by students were the consequences of the conflict, which were reported as a determinant in 55% of the responses. Behaviors classified as consequences were: removal of the student to the office, suspension or expulsion, physical fighting or injury resulting from such conflict, mental or emotional injury, and damage to the building or furniture. Students' comments related to this aspect were:

- *By finding out the consequences so if the consequences are more serious then the conflict must be more serious.*

Table 4.8

Relative Frequencies of Criteria for Deciding Seriousness of Conflict
Reported by Gender of Respondents

	Males		Females		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Criteria:						
1. Consequences						
A. Removal of student to office	7	21.2	3	5.2	10	11.0
B. Suspension or expulsion	3	9.1	4	6.9	7	7.7
C. Physical fighting or injury	6	18.2	12	20.7	18	19.8
D. Mental or emotional injury	1	3.0	7	12.1	8	8.8
E. Damage to building or furniture	1	3.0	2	3.4	3	3.3
F. General consequences	3	9.1	1	1.7	4	4.4
Subtotal	21	63.6	29	50.0	50	55.0
2. Shouting, screaming, swearing	3	9.1	11	19.0	14	15.4
3. Repetition or escalation of conflict incidents, including involvement of others	3	9.1	8	13.8	11	12.1
4. Cannot be resolved	0	0	2	3.4	2	2.2
5. Rules, guidelines	1	3.0	1	1.7	2	2.2
6. Interferes with learning	0	0	2	3.4	2	2.2
7. General, miscellaneous	5	15.2	5	8.6	10	11.0
*Total	33	100.0	58	99.9	91	100.1

* n denotes number of responses, not respondents.

** Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

- *The thing that makes me decide if it is serious is how bad the punishment is.*
- *If injury, that is, bruises, cuts, results, or a fight or if damage is caused to the surroundings.*

Shouting, screaming, or swearing was listed by 15.4% of students as being an indicator of serious conflict. This factor differed from the previous one in that it was likely to be part of the on-going process of conflict, as well as being a result. Yelling or screaming by one party tended to provoke a similar response from the other party. Shouting or screaming, therefore, was related to the third factor for determining seriousness of the conflict: repetition or escalation of conflict incidents, including the involvement of others, which was quoted by 12.1% of respondents. These were the conflicts which students viewed as being unlikely to be resolved. Students' comments illustrating these criteria were:

- *Serious require a lot of yelling and disagreeing and fighting*
- *By how much yelling is going on and how mad the teacher is and how loud he/she yells.*
- *Serious is when the problem cannot be resolved by the teacher and student. It usually involves others (that is, parents, staff, principal).*
- *Serious conflict is conflict that occurs frequently and causes a wall to go up between the two people involved.*
- *If a student and teacher argue about the same things over and over and over again, then either the student or teacher is doing something wrong.*

Several insightful comments which did not fall in the categories mentioned most often are worthy of mention. A conflict was deemed serious:

- *If it caused a great deal of time out of class for the teacher for that hurts other kids who want to learn.*
- *By how much the conscience is going to hurt the teacher and/or student.*
- *It depends on your values. I believe in respecting your elders but someone else may not.*
- *When both people involved do things that they would not normally do that makes the conflict worse.*
- *The school rules are the best criteria to use, because if somebody say smokes in the bathroom that can be pretty serious and that's where the teacher has a right to step in and have conflict with the student. That is a good kind of conflict because it is protecting the school environment.*

There appeared to be three important differences between the responses of males and females in this category. First, males used consequences more often than did females as a determinant of the seriousness of conflict (63.6% of responses compared to 50% of

responses). This was especially evident in the consequence of the student being removed from the classroom and sent to the office. Second, females were more concerned than males were with shouting, swearing, and screaming. Third, although it did not quite meet level chosen as being meaningful, mental or emotional injury was mentioned by females more often than by males.

Initiation of Conflict

When asked to identify who initiated conflict, male respondents reported that conflict was initiated by:

students—45.4% of the time,
teachers—45.8% of the time, and
other causes—8.8% of the time.

Female respondents reported conflict was initiated by:

students—54.7% of the time,
teachers—37.6% of the time, and
other causes—7.7% of the time.

Therefore, the overall average for all respondents was 50.1% for student initiated conflict, 41.7% for teacher initiated conflict, and 8.3% for other causes. There appear to be important differences between males' and females' opinions. Females identified student initiators more often than did males. Males more often than females believed teachers initiated conflict. It should be noted that there is no inference made regarding the gender of the actual initiator of the conflict.

Positive Outcomes of Conflict

Table 4.9 illustrates students' perceptions of the positive outcomes of conflict. While both genders gave approximately equal weight to "problem can be solved", there were obvious differences between females and males in the levels of support for two other factors. Female respondents placed much more emphasis on the benefit of understanding and closeness, while the male respondents emphasized the aspect of

Table 4.9

Relative Frequencies of Positive Outcomes of Conflict Reported
by Gender of Respondents

Effect:	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Understand one another better, become closer	5	14.7	25	41.7	30	31.9
Learn from it, avoid future conflict	10	29.4	10	16.7	20	21.3
Problem can be solved	6	17.6	12	20.0	18	19.1
Express emotions	3	8.8	4	6.7	7	7.4
Learning situation is improved	3	8.8	3	5.0	6	6.4
Truth could be revealed	3	8.8	3	5.0	6	6.4
General, miscellaneous	4	11.8	3	5.0	7	7.4
**Total	34	99.9	60	100.1	94	99.9

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents.

**Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

learning from the conflict and avoiding similar conflict in the future. The differences between the responses of females and males appear to reflect different emphases—males on the functional, personal level, and females on the interpersonal aspects. Illustrative comments by females include:

- *People sometimes realize the feelings of the other and begin to see him/her in a different light.*
- *One can understand another's point of view.*
- *Teacher and student work out the differences and try to understand the other person's reasoning.*
- *Teachers/students may learn the other is human and has fears and dreams, and can make mistakes or have a bad day.*
- *Teacher and student can share their feelings, tell each other what they can do differently and come to an agreement and stop having conflicts.*
- *The classroom will become a better environment for learning. You won't have to worry about coming to class.*

Males commented:

- *Both teacher and student could learn from the conflict and that would help prevent that from happening again.*
- *You know not to do the bad thing you did again because you will receive a punishment.*
- *They might be able to solve the problem and help it from occurring again.*

Negative Outcomes of Conflict

From the data presented in Table 4.10, it can be seen that, with the exception of two areas, female and male students had similar perceptions concerning the negative outcomes of conflict. A higher percentage of responses by female students indicated females appeared to be more concerned with the continuation of the conflict as a negative outcome than were males, while a higher percentage of responses by males than females indicated violence or injury as a negative outcome. Males and females placed similar emphases on removal of the student or teacher by suspension or firing, the relationship being negatively affected, interference with the learning of students, and emotional damage. In the students' words:

- *Teacher and student may never get along for the rest of the year.*
- *Teacher and student leave things unresolved and the student can start doing nothing in his/her class just to make the teacher mad.*
- *A student gets a grudge and does stuff like steal and destroy teacher's property.*
- *Conflict is never forgotten and there is a constant disagreement.*

Table 4.10

Relative Frequencies of Negative Outcomes of Conflict Reported
by Gender of Respondents

Effect	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Continuation or escalation of conflict	5	13.5	20	25.3	25	21.6
Suspension, expulsion, transfer, firing	7	18.9	18	22.8	25	21.6
Relationship negatively affected	6	16.2	15	19.0	21	18.1
Violence, injury	9	24.3	4	5.1	13	11.2
Interferes with learning	4	10.8	8	10.1	12	10.3
Emotional hurt or damage	4	10.8	8	10.1	12	10.3
General or unclassified statements	2	5.4	6	7.6	8	6.9
**Total	37	99.9	79	100.0	116	100.0

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents.

**Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

- *Disruption of the class makes it harder to learn.*
- *If you have a conflict and lose, you may not be ready/willing to deal with it again.*

Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict

Teacher's Strategies

Table 4.11 presents students' suggestions for ways teachers could avoid negative conflict. Communicating with the student by listening and discussing the conflict was the strategy suggested for teachers most often by students, with it being mentioned twice as often by females than by males. This is consistent with the females' responses in Table 4.9 which stressed interaction between students and the teacher. Male students mentioned equal, fair treatment more often than did females, although not to the level of significance set in this study. As many strategies which were mentioned were very individualistic, few could be grouped into categories based on similarities. Specific examples of students' suggestions were:

- *Listen to us and try to see the situation from our point of view.*
- *Be patient and understanding, giving a little leeway. It's not their life.*
- *Don't be a stickler to the rules. Let some things go if they are not serious.*
- *Tell the student to come in after school or step outside and talk about it instead of making a scene or sending them down to the office.*
- *Relax a bit. Don't jump if the student says, "I hate this class."*
- *Ignore it and give student another chance.*
- *If there was [sic] more conflict management courses maybe they could use different methods.*

Students' Strategies

Table 4.12 illustrates the suggestions that students presented for students to avoid negative conflict. These strategies can be separated into two broad categories. In the first category would be found those suggestions that propose a change in student behavior to avoid the original conflict situation, or one similar to it. Respondents recognized that certain student behaviors had caused or contributed to teacher-student conflict; accordingly, they advised that students adopt acceptable behavior, listen to the teacher, be calm and polite, complete assignments, and avoid deliberately annoying the teacher. The second category contains suggestions for interacting with the teacher in light of the existing conflict. The suggestion of highest frequency was to ignore or avoid the

Table 4.11

Relative Frequencies of Teacher Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict
Reported by Gender of Respondents

Strategy:	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Listen to the student, discuss problem	5	16.7	19	33.3	24	27.6
Avoid, ignore	5	16.7	7	12.3	12	13.8
Relax, be calm, polite	3	10.0	7	12.3	10	11.5
Treat students fairly, equally	5	16.7	5	8.8	10	11.5
Remove the student from class	3	10.0	2	3.5	5	5.7
Try to see students' points of view	2	6.7	3	5.3	5	5.7
Don't be so strict, give a little leeway	1	3.3	3	5.3	4	4.6
Work on improving classroom learning environment	2	6.7	2	3.5	4	4.6
Deal with conflicts when they are minor, before they escalate	1	3.3	2	3.5	3	3.4
Give students another chance	0	0	2	3.5	2	2.3
Unclassified, general statements	3	10.0	5	8.8	8	9.2
**Total	30	100.1	57	100.1	87	99.9

*n denoted number of responses, not respondents.

**Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

Table 4.12

Relative Frequencies of Student Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict
Reported by Gender of Respondents

Strategy:	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Control temper, be calm, polite, respectful	3	9.7	18	31.6	21	23.9
Behave properly, avoid behavior that contributed to conflict	8	25.8	9	15.8	17	19.3
Listen to the teacher	5	16.1	10	17.5	15	17.0
Avoid, ignore	3	9.7	7	12.3	10	11.4
Try to understand teacher's point of view	3	9.7	6	10.5	9	10.2
Avoid deliberately annoying the teacher	4	12.9	1	1.8	5	5.7
Complete assignments	2	6.5	1	1.8	3	3.4
General or unclassified statements	3	9.7	5	8.8	8	9.1
**Total	31	100.1	57	100.1	88	100.0

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents.

**Totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

situation. The second was to try to understand the teacher's point of view. Listening to the teacher could also be included in this category. These suggestions dealt with how to manage the conflict situation rather than ignoring or setting it aside. The behavior changes suggested to avoid similar conflict assume a new beginning. Student comments that illustrate the above suggestions are:

- *Accept what they are doing in school and leave it at that.*
- *Could have stayed away or not care what the other person's actions were.*
- *Behaving properly, not disrupting the class.*
- *Don't get in trouble in the first place.*
- *Try to respect the teacher and follow the rules.*
- *Keep from losing temper and saying things they'd regret.*
- *Explain the situation nicely, without an attitude.*
- *Try to look at things from different point of view.*
- *Use the problem solving steps to cool down themselves.*

There were substantial percentage differences in responses by males and females for three strategies. Females reported a higher percentage of responses for controlling temper, being calm, polite, and respectful, while a higher percentage of responses were obtained from males in the category of behaving properly and avoiding behavior that contributed to the conflict. This is consistent with the finding for positive outcomes of conflict. Females tended to mention strategies that emphasized interpersonal factors (being polite and respectful); males were more likely to take a functional approach which did not emphasize interaction. This carried through to the third strategy in which a substantial difference in percentage of response was registered. Males mentioned avoiding deliberately annoying the teacher, and thereby avoiding interaction, considerably more often than did females.

Intentional Involvement in Conflict

The issue of whether behavior is intentional has implications for responding to such behavior and for making changes, that is, modifying inappropriate behavior. Behavior that is unintentional, unplanned must be brought to a conscious level before changes can be made. If behavior is deliberate, intentional, then the assumption is that the person has made a choice to behave in a certain manner and must be prepared to accept the

consequences for misbehavior. Males reported that student involvement in conflict was deliberate in 47% of the cases; females reported that involvement was intentional 49% of the time. Therefore, there do not appear to be differences in perception by gender.

Summary

The five factors that emerged as major sources of teacher-student conflict identified by junior high school students were: communication failure or misunderstanding, value and fairness issues, noncompliance with rules and policies, authority issues, and frustration and irritability. Teacher behaviors that contributed to conflict were those concerned with value and fairness issues, and communication problems. Noncompliance with rules and policies was the student behavior mentioned most often.

Students assigned similar ratings to five kinds of conflict they considered to be most serious: authority issues, violence, communication problems, noncompliance with rules and policies, and value and fairness issues. When determining the seriousness of a conflict, students were most likely to use the consequences of the conflict as the criteria. Repetition or escalation of conflict incidents and extreme shouting were other indicators.

Respondents believed that students initiated conflict approximately 10% more often than did teachers, with female respondents assigning more responsibility to students than to teachers. Both males and females stated that students' participation in conflict was intentional almost 50% of the time.

Respondents recognized that there were both positive and negative outcomes of conflict. The positive outcomes included an improved understanding and relationship between the student and the teacher, learning from the conflict and using that knowledge to avoid similar conflict in the future, and the pragmatic benefit of simply having the conflict resolved. Students gave very similar weight to three negative outcomes: first, continuation or escalation of the conflict, second, suspension or expulsion for the student or transfer or firing for the teacher, and third, a deterioration in the relationship between the student and teacher.

The strategy mentioned most often for teachers to deal with negative conflict was to communicate—listen and discuss the problem with the student. Three other suggestions received similar ratings: avoid or ignore the problem, relax and be calm and polite, and treat students fairly.

Suggestions of strategies for students to avoid negative conflict consisted of avoiding the original conflict by listening and behaving properly, ignoring the problem, and behaving in a manner that de-escalated an existing conflict.

Although there were differences in the responses of males and females in several respects, an overall pattern could not be determined. Both genders stressed such aspects as communicating, avoiding future conflict, and refraining from yelling. However, I did notice that several of the responses from females dealt with improving interpersonal relationships, while males' responses focused more on avoiding undesirable consequences such as injury or suspension.

CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

In most cases, the responses of interviewees were not presented as frequencies or percentages because of the small number of respondents and responses. I chose instead to present the information more as trends in support of, or in opposition to, the findings of the survey.

Demographic Data

The interview subjects were chosen from four categories of volunteers: those who had never been referred to the principal for a conflict with a teacher, those who had been referred once, those referred twice, and those who had been referred more than twice. A short description of the students in each category has been provided below. Students' and teachers' names are pseudonyms, not necessarily of a matching gender.

Group 1—Never Referred to Principal for Conflict

Kerri, Jill, and Tara formed this group. Kerri appeared to be self-confident and assured. She responded to questions in a friendly, relaxed manner. She was absolutely attentive, maintained steady eye contact, and appeared to consider each question seriously (as did all the interviewees). Jill presented herself more forcefully than most respondents. It appeared that she had considered many of the issues on her own and had formulated strong opinions about teacher-student conflict. Jill was very generous with her time; she did not seem to be in any rush to finish the interview. This was also typical of other students interviewed. Tara was somewhat quiet and reserved during the interview. I often had to ask probing questions to get her to elaborate on responses.

Group 2—Referred to Principal Once

The second group was comprised of Trina, Dean and Erika. These students had chosen to be interviewed during class time, and all assured me that this presented no problem. They were willing to catch up out of class time. The interviews with these

students were very straight forward. They were very cooperative, although less talkative than I had anticipated, based on my observations of them in informal situations.

Group 3—Referred to Principal Twice

Jan, Dawn, and Peter were the respondents in this group. Peter had requested that his interview be conducted at noon hour, because he stayed at school during that time but did not eat lunch, so it was somewhat boring during the first part of the lunch hour. Jan's interview was interesting in that she thanked me for choosing her to be interviewed. She seemed truly interested in the topic and process. Other students were eager to be interviewed also, as some of them stopped me in the hallway and asked that I please choose them, or asked why I had not chosen them. What conflict stories they may have had to relate! They were somewhat accepting when I explained the process by which names had been drawn from volunteers. I was impressed with the support I received from students and parents. Dawn's mother wrote an extra note on her permission letter stating that she hoped I would be able to interview her daughter (there had been a possibility that Dawn would be transferring schools, but this did not occur).

Group 4—Referred to Principal More than Twice

Matt, Wade, and Jim were the three students in the final group. Like the other respondents, these students were very cooperative. Matt was very shy. He made eye contact only a few times during the interview, and occasionally responded to questions with a nod or gesture to indicate "yes" or "no". Wade was also quite quiet during the interview. Jim, however, was just the opposite. He was gregarious and outgoing, and seemed to love to talk. His interview was interactive. He answered questions in a thorough manner, and then proceeded to ask me what my thoughts were on the topic, and what I had been like as a student his age. He was also the student who introduced the issue that differences in respect for teachers were determined by their gender. His was a very interesting, thought-provoking interview.

Causes of Conflict

The twelve interview respondents identified the following as the most common causes of teacher-student conflict (Table 5.1):

1. Noncompliance with rules and policies, including lack of cooperation,
2. Value and fairness issues,
3. Communication failure, misunderstanding,
4. Authority issues, and
5. Responsibility and substandard performance issues.

When these results were compared with those from the larger group that completed the questionnaire, it was found that the first four issues were common to both groups. However, the interviewed students did not identify frustration and irritability as the fifth issue; they chose responsibility and substandard performance instead. The similarity in results contributes to the reliability of the study. Under different conditions, and at a different time, the students provided highly similar responses to the questions. This is in accord with Jackson and Rothney's 1961 study and Walsh's 1968 study that found that respondents were quite consistent when their responses to questions during an interview were compared with responses to the same questions on a questionnaire (cited in Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 447). With the exception of "frustration and irritability" the interviewees also ranked the teachers' and students' behaviors in the same order as was done on the questionnaire.

The interviewed students' emphasis on the standard of performance of teachers that was not present in the questionnaire responses is evident in Jan's comments that teachers cause conflict:

When they talk about the same thing over and over and it's not fun, so then people start, then students start to talk because they're bored, and I like to have an exciting class with an exciting teacher. It makes it fun to learn, so . . .

Because of a boring class, because they're [students are] bored so they want to entertain themselves by doing something different, and then they get in trouble for talking or something or getting up.

Table 5.1
Frequency and Percentage of Conflict Caused by Teachers, Students, or Other Factors Reported by Interview Respondents

Causes of Conflict	Teachers' Behaviors			Student's Behaviors			Other Factors			Total	
	Male n	Female n	Total n %	Male n	Female n	Total n %	Male n	Female n	Total n %	n	%
1. Noncompliance with rules and policies, lack of cooperation	0	0	0 0	13	14	27 57.4	0	0	0 0	27	32.9
2. Value & fairness issues	7	9	16 48.5	1	0	1 2.1	0	0	0 0	17	20.7
3. Communication failure, misunderstanding	3	3	6 18.2	3	4	7 14.8	0	0	0 0	13	15.9
4. Authority issues	2	2	4 12.1	3	6	9 19.1	0	0	0 0	13	15.9
5. Responsibility & substandard performance issues	2	3	5 15.2	0	1	1 2.1	0	0	0 0	6	7.3
6. Frustration & irritability	0	0	0 0	0	2	2 4.3	0	1	1 50	3	3.7
7. Differences over methods	0	2	2 6.1	0	0	0 0	0	0	0 0	2	2.4
8. Personality clashes	0	0	0 0	0	0	0 0	0	1	1 50	1	1.2
**Total	14	19	33 100.1	20	27	47 99.9	0	2	2 100	82	100

*n denotes number of responses, not respondents

**totals not equal to 100% are the result of rounding.

Jill contributed this:

If the student knows that they handed in a paper and the teacher doesn't have it, the teacher says, "Well, I never lose things, so obviously you didn't hand it in."

Jill also thought that teachers sometimes interfered too readily in students' affairs, not letting them have sufficient time to solve their problems, as in:

They went and told the principal about it. That sometimes doesn't help, because it could be solved easier between the two kids instead of the teacher trying to help sometimes.

Kerri's response was:

I think they don't really explain it well enough, and they sometimes, they just leave them to do whatever. They don't say anything to the students if they're doing something wrong.

Most Serious Types of Teacher-Student Conflict

There are some differences when the interview findings are compared to the responses from the questionnaire. The five most serious types of conflict mentioned by interviewees were:

1. Communication failure, misunderstanding, 22%.
2. Removal from class, suspension or expulsion from school, 19%
3. Value and fairness issues, 15%
4. Noncompliance with rules and policies, 15%, and
5. Authority issues, 15%.

All the issues except the second one were also in the top five issues on the survey. On the questionnaire, students mentioned the consequence of suspension or expulsion as a determinant of the seriousness of the preceding conflict only in 5.5% of responses. On the interviews, this consequence was mentioned much more often. In addition, violence slipped to sixth place from second place in terms of relative frequency of being chosen. It should also be noted that several students qualified their responses by stating that they had not actually been involved or observed a particular type of behavior, but that they had heard of such behavior. One of the references to violence and the listing of sexual

harassment as the most serious type of conflict were in this category. As Erika stated in reference to a teacher taking out a problem physically on a student:

I'm just thinking about it. I've never actually seen it.

The serious conflicts described by students tended to be extreme cases of the common causes of conflicts, for example, very loud and prolonged yelling, or a teacher or student continuing the conflict situation beyond the average length of time.

Criteria for Establishing the Seriousness of Conflict

Although the small number of interviewees resulted in a correspondingly low number of responses regarding criteria, the pattern was similar to that for the questionnaire. Consequences accounted for 54% of the responses. The only area of difference was that 15% of the responses dealt with the issue of fairness, which had not been mentioned in the survey.

Initiation of Conflict

The interview respondents attributed conflict initiation to students far more often than did survey participants (67% to 50%). Perhaps those students who volunteered to be interviewed had more definite feelings about conflict, and were less likely to choose a response in the mid-range. Another possibility is that these students had considered this question more specifically in reference to the conflict incidents they were prepared to relate.

The responses of males and females were very close. Male respondents reported conflict was initiated by:

students—67% of the time

teachers—32% of the time, and

other causes—1% of the time.

Female respondents reported conflict initiated by:

students—66.4% of the time

teachers—27.9% of the time, and

other causes—5.7% of the time.

Intentional Involvement in Conflict

I wished to determine students' perceptions of whether student participants in teacher-student conflict had chosen to be involved or if their participation was accidental. It is possible that teachers' reactions to students behavior would vary depending on the teachers' perceptions of whether the involvement was deliberate. The teacher might be more tolerant, more willing to explain or compromise if he/she believed that the student had acted impulsively. Male respondents classed 58% of student involvement to being intentional, while female respondents attributed 48%. Male interviewees ascribed deliberate intention to students 11% more often than did male survey participants. Females' responses on the two instruments were almost identical. Students had a number of explanations for intentionally getting involved in conflict, as exemplified by Jill's explanation:

They're very aware of what they're saying. They know what they're saying. They know that a conflict is going to start and they just thrive on it. Basically, some, some students just like to see the teachers get mad. Sometimes it's for the fun; sometimes it's to see if they could overpower the teacher, if they can win. It's a challenge to some students, to see if they can win against other teachers. It's kind of like the kids have a little tick board. "Ah, got this teacher! Ah, tick." A lot of kids like to know, "Oh I got this teacher! She's right there." A lot of kids know that they have the teacher right in the palm of their hands and that's where they want then.

Peter stated that students chose to either be involved or avoid conflict 80% of the time. He thought that in classes in which the teacher had difficulty controlling the students, pupils chose to get involved in conflict situations more often. This, of course, becomes a vicious cycle because the teacher's lack of control results in more opportunity for disruptive activities and involvement in conflict situations. Tara's explanation for deliberate involvement was:

They really are guilty of what the teacher was telling them, and they just don't want to admit it, so they try to jump to their defense even if they know they did it.

Matt added:

Maybe they don't like the teacher or maybe the teacher pushed them before and they're going to act up on purpose to make them mad.

Dean's explanation was:

[Students] try to show everybody that you're like big and tough and you can stand up to a teacher or that they could, you know, show off, or sometimes it's just a cry for help or something.

Jim presented an interesting situation. By his own description,

I don't really get in trouble that much. Like, I get in trouble lots, but it's not that serious: "Oh, Jim, sit down. Oh, Jim, don't talk," stuff like that, but going to the office and stuff like that, like four or five times a year, something like that.

Jim stated that students participate in conflict intentionally only 5 to 10% of the time, and:

I don't think anybody wants to get in trouble on purpose. That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. There's no point in doing that. I don't think they go out looking for it. Once you're talking and people start laughing at you, laughing at your jokes, you keep going and going and going. You're still not looking for it. You're just, you know . . .

Jim's description of attention-getting behavior was shared by several other students.

However, it is peculiar that he apparently did not make a connection between his getting into trouble and being sent to the office, and the fact that he had a choice whether to engage in types of behavior that resulted in those consequences. It appeared that he abdicated responsibility for his behavior.

Critical Incident Conflict Stories

Each student had been requested to think of a memorable conflict before he/she came to the interview; all were prepared to do so. I also gave each student the opportunity to tell as many additional stories as he/she wished. Twenty-five conflict stories were related. Several themes emerged as the students recounted the events that were significant to them. Excerpts from a number of the incidents, organized under themes, are described here.

Student Misbehavior that Escalated to a Major Conflict

Most incidents in this category are related to behaviors found in the "Noncompliance with Rules and Policies" classification of causes of conflict. Jill's account is an example:

Like, James in class will make rude comments as a joke. He means them as a joke, but they're so rude it's not funny. About the teacher. And he figures they're a joke, but they're not a joke, and so the teacher comes out and says something, and when the teacher defends himself, James gets mad and then, and then, it all starts a big fight because James is saying, "Hey, look buddy, you know, it was, it was just a joke," and Mr. Daniels tries to tell him, "It may be a joke but it's not funny," and James gets mad and goes, "Oh yeah, and what do you know?" and then the big conflict happens right there and then. What happens is, is they get really mad at each other and there's yelling, a lot of yelling, and he gets, James got kicked out of his class, . . . , and James will tap on the door and make a fool of himself, and then he gets sent to the office.

Tara remembered a similar incident:

We were in the library doing our research. We had a sub because Mr. Wagner was sick. And then Shawn, he got, I don't know what the sub was saying to him, but Shawn got mad and threw down a book, and the sub started yelling at him. It turned into a big yelling match, and Shawn ended up swearing at the sub, and he got sent down to the office.

Jan's story is somewhat more complicated. She had been in minor difficulty with her teacher for talking, passing notes, and failing to start assignments promptly. Jan reported that she and the teacher did not get along very well.

Me and my friends would pass notes and then I stopped doing that and I wouldn't get to work so then finally I said, "I'll get to work," and then my other friend asked me to pass her my comb so then I threw it across the room, and Ms. Berg sent me out of the class, but that, I really didn't think that, just bring it to her, but then since I threw it across the room, I got sent out of the class. And then I was sitting out there [in the hall], and the principal walked by, and then, at the wrong time, and then I got sent down to the office for the rest of the period.

Jan laughed several times as she recounted this story, and she commented on the role of coincidence in it:

It was a lot of coincidence because just then my friend asked me to throw my comb, so then I did, and then I got sent out of the room, which wasn't, well, kind of was my fault, but if she wouldn't have asked me for my comb, I probably would have stayed in the classroom. And then when I was sitting out there, the principal came along, so it was a lot of coincidence.

Trina also saw humor in three incidents in which she was personally involved. The first incident, as described by Trina is:

I always get in trouble for little things. This one girl [Marie], Ms. Mayer told her, "Sit down," or whatever, and, like, I'm, "Yeah, Marie." So she made me stay half an hour after school all because I said, "Yeah, Marie." Because she said, "I don't like Yeahers, and started telling about all the Yeahers, so I'm a Yeaher. Yeah."

When I asked Trina why she thought that conflict had happened, the following exchange occurred:

Trina: I don't know. Because she's in a bad mood.

Interviewer: And what you did had nothing to do with it? Why do you suppose what you said made her give you the detention?

Trina: I don't know. [Laughs]

In the second incident, Trina was laughing about something that was related to a lesson, but the teacher thought she was laughing about an unrelated matter. Trina's description was:

This other time, she started yelling at me because I was laughing in class. I just started laughing because we were doing this classification chart, right, and we had to classify people into groups, and she broke it down into these groups, and she broke it down into this group that there was only one person in the class with glasses, so I just looked at my friend and started laughing. She started yelling at me in front of the whole class, and everybody was staring at me, and I was, like, "I was only laughing." And then she asked me why and I told her, "Well, there's only one person in the class with glasses on," and it's like, "Oh, sorry." She looks around and it's like, "O-o-h."

In the third incident, Trina had been sent to the office to complete a discipline form because she had been talking after being requested to stop doing so. This was the first time Trina had been required to fill in that form, and she did not know that it was standard procedure for the student and teacher to meet after school to discuss the situation described on the form. Trina did not show up for the appointment, and:

I just went back to my regular classes. So the fourth day I went back to that subject, and the teacher said I was kicked out of class, and I'm like, "Why?" He was like, "Because you never came to see me after school." He never told me; he just said, "Go down to the office." So I'm like, "Okay." [Laughs] So I went down to the office again and I had to sit in the time-out room for the rest of that subject. And then the fifth day the principal said, "Well, go down to Mr. Blair and talk to him." So I went down to Mr. Blair and I was talking to

him and he said, "Well, you were supposed to come and see me after school." I said, "Nobody said that." So he like, "Okay, then sit down."

Although the student's misbehavior started the two previous conflicts, miscommunication, or lack of communication, definitely played a role also.

Disagreements that Escalated to Physical Confrontation

Students were unanimous in their opposition to the use of force in the course of a conflict. Matt reported two incidents of physical confrontation, the inappropriate use of force by teachers. In the first incident, a girl had asked the teacher to slow down his presentation of the lesson because she was having difficulty keeping up with him. When he refused to slow down, she walked to the front of the room and repeated her request.

Matt reported that the teacher started to yell at her, then:

He told her to sit down and he walked towards her and drove his arm into her arm kind of thing. She confronted him and said, "Why did you push me?" and then she went back and sat down.

Matt's second account was of a teacher who separated a student from the classmates with whom he had been talking. Then:

The student said a smart remark. The teacher told him to go down to the office. The student started to pick up his bag and stuff and he's walking towards the door and the teacher shoved him, kind of. And then the student called him a name and then he went down to the office and got expelled from the class for a while.

Jim's talking led to a far bigger confrontation than he anticipated. His story is:

Well, we had a substitute and we had a guest speaker and then me and two other of my friends were sitting in the back of the corner and we were talking a little bit. Then he told one of my friends to be quiet, right, and so we'd be quiet, right, and then we started, after five or ten minutes we started talking again, and he told us to stop, and ten minutes later we started talking again, and so he told me to come out, right, so I stepped out, and he grabbed me by the back of my neck, and he took me to the office, right, and he's holding my jacket, but then my mom walked in to give me my lunch, and then she saw his hand on the back of my neck.

Jim fully recognized his contribution to this conflict, and he seemed less concerned about the substitute teacher grabbing him by the collar than was his mother. His mother discussed the issue with the principal. Initially, Jim was going to be suspended for being disrespectful. However, he asked the principal if he could stay in the school if he

apologized to the substitute for being disrespectful, and that is the compromise they reached. When questioned about consequences from his parents, Jim stated that his father did not ground him, but he did let him know he disapproved of such behavior.

My dad, he doesn't really like me to get in trouble, and he gets really mad. So, even if I talk about this, he'll like have a mad face on, and stuff like that 'cause he doesn't like me getting in trouble, 'cause the school's for learning and that's what you should go there for, . . .

Disagreement with Teacher's Methods or Performance

Jim described the way in which he thought the teacher's method of handling the class contributed to conflict:

I don't come to school to be yelled at, and not have fun or nothing. I come to learn, but I want to have a little fun too. So if they're not going to let me do nothing, just make me sit and write all class for fifty minutes, they have to expect somebody to be a little restless and . . . I think if the teacher's really mean, like if you say one word, it's like, "Shut up! I don't want to hear it," I think that drives the students more to be bad because school's not supposed to be boring.

Peter chose to tell about a conflict in which he disagreed with the manner in which a teacher dealt with a conflict between two students.

Two kids started fighting and the teacher didn't even, he didn't even try to stop them. He just let them fight. He tried to break it up, but then he just kept letting them fight, and he didn't even call anyone to stop it.

Jill also recalled an incident which she thought the teacher could have handled more effectively. A student, Matthew Fraser, had been bothering her, and when she thought that his comments were becoming inappropriate, she asked him to stop. The teacher overheard the conversation and intervened:

Basically, Mr. Donahue heard it, and went, and brought us out of class and talked about it, and Matthew Fraser got mad because he figured that I told on him, and so the whole class was harping on me because they figured I was a tattletale. And Mr. Donahue heard them all yelling at me, so he took it to the principal, and then that's when it all started and I was disliked for a lon-n-ng time in grade eight and it was very hard for me, because I didn't tell anybody anything, and it just happened because it just started. I don't really regret Mr. Donahue saying it. I just didn't think that he should have took those precautions. I think he should have thought it over a little bit more before taking it to the principal and making it such a big issue because it really caused a lot of pain last year. The teacher made me mad that he went and just got into it like that, because I think I could have handled it myself.

The conflict between Matthew Fraser and the teacher escalated after this incident, as illustrated by Jill's description:

Matthew Fraser was mad at him. He, he was rude in that class Day 1 though. Like, he talked out of turn, and said all this stuff, and he just got worse after that incident. It got really worse 'cause he had a lot of hate for him.

Jill understood that the teacher had good intentions when he intervened in the conflict; therefore, she was hesitant to mention anything to the teacher.

I thought that he thought that he did right and I didn't want to make him feel that he did wrong. 'Cause, like, Mr. Donahue is a very good teacher and I didn't wanna make him feel bad by saying, "You know, I would have preferred if you wouldn't have said anything." I'm not one to talk to adults like that.

Inappropriate Behavior of the Teacher

Two students related incidents which involved alleged behavior by a teacher that could be considered sexual harassment. The students relating the incidents had not been directly involved. They had been told of the incidents by friends. Although the students indicated that the incidents had been dealt with by the courts in one case, and the principal in another, I consulted the school's counsellor to determine if appropriate action had been taken. It was decided that since the matters had been dealt with by authorities, the only additional action that would be taken would be to inform the students that if their friends had not disclosed all the details, they might want to pursue the matter. The students were so informed and they stated that they would pass the message to their friends.

The first incident involved Wade's friend, who attended a different school. The friend was charged with assault after he fought a teacher whom he believed had touched him inappropriately. That case went through the court system. The second incident involved a friend of Dawn's who wrote a note accusing a teacher of improper behavior—winking at her and touching her. When the principal investigated with the student, her parent, and the teacher, the student explained, "I was just writing. It was something to

write. Like I thought he did . . ., but maybe he wasn't. I thought he winked at me, but maybe he never, but, I just wanted something to write about." Dawn explained:

She just expanded it, exaggerated it, lots!

Even though neither student had been directly involved in these incidents involving allegations of sexual harassment, the issues were obviously important to them, and they considered them to be examples of serious conflict.

Students' Perceptions that Teacher Acted in an Unfair Manner

The interviewees recounted many stories of conflicts in which they believed the teacher blamed an innocent person, picked on a student, or treated students unfairly or unequally. Dean had one such story in which two students had been talking and passing notes to one another.

Then the teacher gets mad and tries to send one of the kids out of the room and then one of them, the kid that's getting sent out of the room, says, "Well, what about the other kid? She was talking too." The teacher goes, "Well, I don't care about her. It was you who may have started it all." And she goes, "Well, how do you know it was me?" She may have thought that all the blame was on her, that she may have started everything while the other kid was getting off scott free . . .

Dean stated that he did not have other conflict stories to tell because he thought all conflicts were essentially the same:

It all basically starts off by talking, not paying attention, and then it, and then it doesn't like, all suddenly become one big yelling thing. It starts off slowly and then it increases and gradually increases more and more and more until finally someone or the teacher finally just blows up and everybody's like, all mad about it.

Peter thought it was unfair that a teacher did not give a student with a learning disability as much help as the student requested. However, he recognized that there wasn't an overt conflict between the student and the teacher; the conflict was actually within Peter. It was the feelings of resentment he had toward the teacher. Peter also described a conflict between himself and a teacher who thought that Peter wasn't working when actually he was sitting thinking about how to solve an assigned problem. Peter

stated that it took him a while to figure out each problem, but he was given a detention because the teacher thought he was not paying attention.

Dawn seemed puzzled by the situation of one of her friends. She and her friend felt that he was being treated differently than other students for the same behaviors. Dawn explained:

I know this guy and one of his teachers is really mean to him and he cannot figure out why, 'cause he'll be, like really good in his class, right, like the teacher won't even notice, and then, it's maybe his looks or something or like, feeling about him or something, for the littlest things he just, the teacher just makes them out to be so big. But, if another kid does it, he just avoids it, like he ignores it until this other person does it.

Kerri's conflict account was of a disagreement between a student and a teacher in which she thought the student, Sandra, deliberately refused to cooperate with the teacher because she thought he was unfair. Sandra had been removed from class because she had not been listening to the lesson, was continuing to talk after being requested to stop, and was not doing her work. Kerri explained that Sandra behaved that way because:

Sandra doesn't really like Mr. Hansen. She thinks that he favors people in a way, with marks and stuff. Like me, for example, I can do a certain thing and then he'll say to someone else they're not allowed to do that. Sandra thinks he favors.

Erika reported two incidents that she considered to be unfair. In the first one,

My friend had a mark and it was printed wrong on her report card, so she went back to Mr. Graham and said, "This is wrong. I have my sheet, the printout." And he's, like, "Oh, it's not my fault," and she's, "Well, what are you gonna do? Can you please change it?" He goes, "Well, I can't change it now," and she goes, "Well, the report card is going to be too late . . . because my mom's gonna wonder," 'cause it was lower than the real mark.

The teacher and student continued to argue until the teacher said, "Not with your attitude, I'm not going to change it." The student then took the report card to the principal who changed it.

In Erika's second story, she and her friend Jane were working on a display board in the hall during the lunch hour. This was a regular task that they did for one of the teachers. Jane had just started to eat her sandwich when:

Mr. Morin walked by and he, like, he said, "What's in your mouth?" She goes, "I'm just finishing a bite of my sandwich," and he started getting mad, saying, "You're not allowed to eat in the hallway," and I said to him, "Well, you know Ms. Travis lets us 'cause we're doing the board and she knows that we wouldn't like, get it on the floor, or whatever," and then he started screaming, saying, "Jane's irresponsible, and she doesn't get the point of no eating in the hallways," and screaming at her, and she was just talking back 'cause that's the way she is. She won't let someone scream at her . . .

Erika reported that this argument continued until Jane said,

"Fine, here take it. If you want it so bad, here take it," so she walked off.

Affect as a Factor in Conflict

Many of the critical conflict incidents that were related illustrate how conflicts were initiated or escalated by affect—the strong emotions of one or both participants. Examples include the incidents in which the teacher grabbed Jim by the collar, the one in which Shawn got mad and threw a book down and the teacher then yelled at him, when the teacher confronted the girls working on the display board in the hall, and when James became mad and started to yell when the teacher asked him to refrain from making rude comments. If the parties in the conflict had had some “wait time” after the initial confrontation, the conflict may not have escalated. When Tara was asked what she, as an observer, thought of the conflict involving Shawn, she replied:

I thought maybe Shawn should calm down, and the sub should calm down instead of yelling at each other. Just talk. Talk calmly.

Erika explained that she was seldom involved in conflict with teachers because:

I can control my temper and I don't get mad that easily. . . . And some people they can't, so they just go crazy and get sent to the office. . . . I guess it is a choice if you can handle it, or if not, then your choice is you get sent there. . . .

Jill also noted how emotions could start a “big fight”:

What happens is, is they get really mad at each other and there's yelling, a lot of yelling. . . .

Humor, Empathy, and Respect

As students recounted their critical incident stories, I noticed that instances of humor, empathy, and respect arose quite often. The presence of humor has been noted in Trina's and Jan's accounts. Erika also reported,

I think it's kind of funny now because, like the way he reacted, it was funny. I'm laughing now, but I was scared then. [Laughs]

This was in response to her being suspended for a day for saying, "Oh, my God!" when she spilled something. Her teacher was offended, although Erika saw nothing wrong with that comment.

When Erika reflected on the incident in which the teacher refused to correct her friend's mark, she commented,

I think it's funny as well [Laughs] because he got mad and he was wrong.

It is possible that these students used humor as a way of coping with the situation in order to avoid bitterness or to avoid dwelling on the negative feelings they experienced at the time it occurred. It showed that they had not been traumatized by the incident. Humor also enabled them to put the issue in perspective, to see that the conflict was just a small aspect of their school lives. Time had provided distance from which to view the conflict more objectively.

The second theme that was noticeable in several interviews was the empathy displayed by several students towards the teachers. The students exhibited considerable insight into the feelings and motivations of the teachers. This was evident in Jill's comment about not wanting to hurt the teacher's feelings because he thought that what he had done was the right thing. Jim demonstrated a similar empathy when he described how a teacher would feel when students were disrespectful:

He didn't feel like he was respected as a teacher and stuff like that, that he wasn't getting his point across and stuff like that. That made him feel pretty bad, I guess.

Dawn considered how the teacher felt when she described how she would react to criticism from a teacher:

Well, if a teacher yells at me, it's not like I can do something about it. Maybe they're having a bad day. I don't like them taking it out on me, but I understand. So I just let it fly, and it doesn't really happen over and over and over.

Despite Peter's frustration with the teacher who had difficulty controlling the class and ignored a fight, his comment that the teacher was probably "feeling bad because he couldn't stop it" showed that he realized that the teacher was feeling frustrated.

Dean described the emotional effect of students' yelling and swearing at the teachers:

For the teachers it could maybe hurt their feelings a bit 'cause kids are doing it back to them and telling them bad names.

The theme of respect was the third issue which was evident in several interviews. Students agreed that mutual respect was an essential component of the teacher-student relationship. Their comments that support that view are:

- *I think that we're all the same and we should all be treated the same. If I treat a teacher with respect, she should treat me with respect. If I don't treat a teacher with respect, I don't expect them to treat me with any respect.*
- *I think it would have been avoided if he'd been taught a little bit of respect for elders. 'Cause the conflict starts by him having no respect.*
- *It's not really the talking that bugs the teachers; it's just the disrespect. I think that really annoys them.*
- *If we're supposed to treat the teacher with respect, I think that we should get the respect back. And some students just don't get any respect whatsoever, and I find that that's wrong.*

Teacher's Gender as a Factor in Respect and Conflict

Jim's circuitous comments on respect led to consideration of a tangential topic—the role of the gender of the teacher in the conflict situation. Jim's explanation is:

It's just something I've been thinking. I've been thinking about this for a long time. If I'm sitting in class and talking, I'm thinking, "Well how come she's [female teacher] not doing anything and the other guy teachers do something?" I've been thinking about that for a long time. I don't know why. It's not like I'm being sexist or nothing like that, but what I've seen you get a lot more, like, if I'm a guy, well I am a guy, if, if, if, I could get a lot more away from a girl teacher, like I could do a lot more bad stuff and get away with it than I could with a guy teacher. I'm not really scared of girl teachers. I listen to them and stuff like that. They don't intimidate me or nothing like that. Then if I go in a guy teacher's class, I'm not really intimidated by them either, but I don't know why, why I have a little more respect for them. They just might scare me a little more. I could get a lot more done. I could do a lot more with a woman teacher and do bad stuff and they won't do nothing, but if I do the same thing with a guy teacher . . . It's not the teacher's reaction; it's just my feeling of them. I'm not scared of the female teachers. They don't intimidate me or nothing like that, and the guys sort of don't, but sort of do, because when they get mad, it's a lot more worse than if a girl gets mad.

When Jim was asked if he thought this was a common thing with males, he responded:

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

I asked Jim to what he attributed this attitude. At first he discounted his upbringing and the school and society in general, saying it was the result of observations and experiences in individual classrooms. Then he switched roles and asked me, "When you were young, were you ever bad?" He then asked if I had observed that males in my classes (as a student) had been meaner to female teachers than they had been to male teachers. Then he asked for my opinion about why more boys than girls misbehaved. "What's your opinion? I just want to know." I responded by saying that I thought it was the different ways girls and boys were socialized, girls to be quiet and well-behaved, and boys to be active and assertive. Jim responded:

Oh yeah. Yeah. That's what I think too. Girls get Barbies and boys get trucks and they start hitting them together and stuff like that and it all starts from that.

Then Jim surprised me when I commented, "But maybe things will change." He replied,

I hope not.

Interviewer: You hope not! [Laughs] You hope not because you are in the group that is sort of privileged?

Jim: I like, I like the way I am. I, I put everybody as an equal, all right, but that's just my opinion. My opinion is nothing like with what society puts people as. Like they usually put men higher than women, for some reason. I put everybody as an equal. I, I, I, just like being a guy. I don't know. It's a lot easier than being a girl. They got all these problems and all that.

Jim's observations and opinions raised many interesting questions for further study. It was not possible to include them in this study because Jim was one of the last students to be interviewed. However, I did determine the gender of the teachers and students that were described in the critical incident descriptions. Students identified teachers and students by gender in 24 of 25 incidents. Of the teacher conflict participants, 19 of the 24 (79%) were male. Of the students, 12 were male. Male teachers comprised 53% of the staff, and would, therefore, be expected to be represented in conflict stories in a similar ratio. If students were more intimidated by male teachers, as Jim claimed, it would be

reasonable to expect that there would be less misbehavior, and therefore, less conflict in their classes. However, it is also possible that if the male teachers were more assertive, there would be more confrontations in their classes. This lends support to Jamieson and Thomas' (1974, p. 334) finding of there being more competition by students with teachers who use more coercive power. In classes in which the teachers did not respond to student misbehavior, there would probably be a more disruptive environment, but less confrontation, between students and teacher. Many questions were raised for which answers cannot be provided in this study.

Students' Lack of Influence or Power

Students who were interviewed appeared to be concerned and frustrated by a lack of influence in comparison to the teacher. This was especially evident in situations in which the conflict had been referred to the principal. This lack of influence went beyond the communication problems described in the survey section. Students were not only frustrated by the teacher's misuse of his/her power, but by their inability to influence issues that concerned them. They viewed themselves as the automatic losers in a win-lose situation. Their views are portrayed in the comments that follow. Erika:

The principal doesn't know exactly what went on. There's two sides of the story, so he wouldn't get the full picture and the student always ends up getting punished anyway.

Matt:

It's not very fair because the teacher will tell the story to the principal, and the student will have a chance to explain it, but the principal trusts the teacher more 'cause he works with them, so the student kind of gets a not very fair chance to explain that much.

Effectiveness of Involvement of the Principal

Students were divided in their opinions on the advisability of involving the principal in attempting to manage or resolve a conflict. Their responses indicated that this was a very individualistic and situational issue. One student first stated that teachers should handle conflicts themselves, then proceeded to give the opposite opinion in relation to one of her critical incident stories. Perhaps their responses were largely determined by

whether they were participants or observers in the conflict, that is, avoid the administrator's involvement if they were personally involved in conflict with the teacher, but utilize his/her authority to manage or resolve the problem if it was another student who was involved. As noted above, some students doubted that they would get a fair hearing from the principal. In addition, several of them thought that involving the administrator actually escalated the conflict, or resulted in more serious negative effects than would have been the case otherwise. Examples of the contrary opinions held by students are:

- *They [teachers] could get involved, but not the principal. I find that it's never a big enough deal to really get into it like that. Everything could be solved so much easier without . . .*
- *I think the teacher should have given the problems to the principal because, I don't mean to be rude, but I don't think he can handle it. He's, he's too nice. It's, he's too nice, he can't handle it.*
- *Where the teacher can't handle it, then they should be sent to the principal, but if the teacher can handle it, they should try to deal with it in their own resources, 'cause, like, the principal, it's kind of like a big step, because then they call home and you get in trouble at home, plus at school. If the kid just likes to really bug the teacher and keeps doing it and keeps doing it, like, if they're joking around it's okay, but if they're not, and they keep insulting the person or they keep insulting the teacher or talking back to the teacher, then I think it should be referred to the principal because I think the principal's more strict about it.*
- *Well, say you're a person who never say goes down there too often, you get kind of nervous, sort of, oh no, you're going to get into trouble and everything, but then there are kids who have been down there so many times that they don't really care. They can go down there, they don't care if they're expelled, they don't care. They know what's gonna happen already and they're not even worried about it.*

Students' references to "the principal" were made in general terms. None of them named a specific administrator. It appeared they were generalizing to the position not to a particular person.

Positive Outcomes of Conflict

Interviewees reported positive effects similar to those reported in the survey results. "Truth could be revealed" was the only category not represented. Two students described how the conflict led to their being good friends with the teacher. Jill had been upset with Mr. Donahue because she felt that he had interfered and made a conflict situation worse. However, she recognized a positive outcome:

Well, I guess, me and Mr. Donahue ever since then have been really good friends. I could talk to Mr. Donahue and he's one of my favorite teachers. He was the best teacher I've ever had. So that was a good outcome, because after, we kept talking on a daily basis and we always talked, He's one of my favorite teachers now.

Jan had been sent out in the hall for throwing an object in Ms. Berg's class. The principal had walked past and had taken her to the office. When Jan was asked about positive outcomes, she responded:

Well, she got one better student. Now that I cooperate more it's less hard for her to teach. After that I've been fine in her class, and her and I have been getting along all the time.

Jan's story was unusual in that it was she who took the initiative to change her behavior after her mother told the teacher that she (the mother) was unable to help because she couldn't control her daughter's behavior in the class:

She made a phone call to my mom, and my mom said, "Well, what do you want me to do about it?" because she can't do anything about it. She said, "You're going to have to handle that," and I've been trying ever since, and we've been getting along, so that's good. I just sort of decided that I should clean up my act . . . and it worked. I learned something from it.

In addition, several students mentioned that the teacher would not have to put up with the student any longer. This was not included in the "Learning situation is improved" category because it seemed to be a very personal response on the part of the teacher.

The response put forth most often by students was that they had learned from the conflict, and could, therefore, avoid certain situations in the future. Examples include:

- *Maybe he would know not to do this again so he wouldn't get in trouble again.*
- *I guess I learned not to say anything like that around him, and that's positive because I wouldn't get in trouble any more.*
- *Now I know I can be bad just for a bit, and talk a little bit, then after he tells me to stop the first time, I know not to do it again, 'cause he will take me down.*

Negative Outcomes of Conflict

There is an important difference in the responses between the survey and the interviews in the outcomes areas. On the survey, the students responses were more general, more hypothetical, that is, what could be the positive and negative outcomes of

conflict. During the interviews, students described the outcomes that they thought had occurred as a result of the conflicts that they had described (most of which they had either participated in or observed). This may explain the different emphases in several areas. For example, on the survey, nine of the responses from males made reference to violence as a negative outcome. During the interviews, one male described two situations in which he thought violence caused a conflict, and he mentioned violence as an outcome once. Therefore, the interviews may present a more accurate representation of the actual situation in the school(s), rather than what might occur.

The results from interview respondents emphasized the personal and interpersonal aspects much more than did the results from the questionnaire. The effect mentioned most often was "emotional hurt of damage" which was sixth in order of frequency on the survey. In the students' words:

- *The other student could have got hurt inside and was all mad then and he didn't want to go back to that class 'cause of what happened. And sometimes the teacher can really feel bad after that and maybe talk to the student but the student may not want to talk to her, and the teacher will feel bad.*
- *Maybe he [the teacher] felt bad for pushing the student.*

The second most frequently mentioned outcome was "relationship negatively affected". This is similar in rank to the survey, where it was ranked third. Students' explanations of this are:

- *It was hard for the teacher to trust me afterwards. If I was writing something down, he would think I was writing a note, but I really wasn't.*
- *I didn't like him the rest of the year. I didn't like him.*
- *Mr. Morin and Jane don't get along any more.*
- *I don't really treat her much different . . . but I don't like the teacher any more.*

The two outcomes ranked first and second on the survey—continuation of the conflict and suspension, expulsion, etc. —were third and fourth in frequency in the interviews. Escalation of the conflict was often very deliberate, as in the cases of students trying to get revenge on a teacher whom they thought had been unjust:

- *The student's friends are in class and they started acting up to get back at the teacher, so it made his job harder.*
- *We all gave him a rough time and stuff like that.*

A particularly insightful comment by Kerri recognized that there were negatives for both the student and teacher. The student would likely see her marks drop, and for the teacher,

- *I think that he is losing a good student in the class, because I know Sandra can be a really good student if she wants to be and she's a really good worker and everything, but he's losing that kind of person, not really seeing what kind of person that Sandra can really be. And he'll never get another chance after.*

Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict

There were only two trends identified in this category, because all other strategies were mentioned only once by respondents. Females suggested that students should behave properly from the beginning, avoiding behavior that was likely to cause conflict. The emphasis of males was on the teacher's improving the learning environment, as in taking his/her time and providing more help to the student, explaining the work more thoroughly.

Summary

The causes of conflict identified by interview respondents were highly congruent with those identified by survey respondents, with noncompliance with rules, values and fairness issues, communication failure, and authority issues being identified by both samples. The interview respondents rated responsibility and substandard performance as the fifth most frequent cause, instead of frustration and irritability that were chosen by survey participants.

The findings for most serious types of conflict were similarly congruent, with the exception that violence was not rated highly by interview participants. They substituted suspension or expulsion for violence.

Interviewees, like survey participants, listed consequences as the most common criterion for determining the seriousness of conflict. There was a difference in perception of initiation of conflict, with interviewees attributing initiation to students 67% of the time compared to the survey respondents' 50%. The percentage of involvement deemed to be intentional was 52% as reported by males, and 48% reported by females. This is very close to the 47% reported by males on the survey, and 49% reported by females.

Examination of the critical incident conflict stories related by the students revealed the following recurring themes:

1. Relatively minor infractions of rules that escalated to major conflicts, occasionally including physical confrontation.
2. Teachers' methods of teaching or ways of handling situations which exacerbated a conflict situation.
3. Possible sexual harassment by a teacher.
4. Unfair treatment of students by the teacher.
5. Affect as a factor in conflict.
6. Students' reflections tempered by humor and empathy.
7. The importance placed on mutual respect.
8. Concerns regarding students' lack of influence.
9. The advisability of involving the principal in teacher-student conflicts.

In addition, one respondent introduced and discussed at length the issue of the teacher's gender as a factor in respect and conflict.

The positive outcomes of conflict recognized by students ranged from the practical aspects of learning how to avoid future conflicts to appreciation of an improved relationship with the teacher.

Negative outcomes of conflict mentioned most frequently were emotional hurt or damage, and damage to the teacher-student relationship.

In terms of strategies for dealing with negative conflict, two preventative suggestions were made: students should behave properly, thereby avoiding conflict, and teachers should attempt to improve the learning environment by giving students more assistance and explaining more thoroughly.

CHAPTER 6

SYNTHESIS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate junior high school students' views of the causes and outcomes of teacher-student conflict, and to examine their participation in such conflict. Students' input was garnered through a survey questionnaire, with follow-up interviews conducted on a sub-group of the survey group. The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. Which student behaviors, teacher behaviors, and other factors cause conflict between students and teachers at the junior high school level?
2. What kinds of teacher-student conflict are the most serious?
3. What criteria do students use in determining the seriousness of conflict?
4. Who or what initiates conflict between students and teachers?
5. What are the positive and negative outcomes of conflict?
6. In what proportion of conflict do students engage intentionally?

This chapter will (a) examine the findings of this study in relation to present knowledge as represented in the reviewed literature, (b) make recommendations and present implications for research and practice, and (c) conclude with personal observations.

Synthesis: Relating Findings to Extant Information

Findings obtained from the questionnaire were combined with those from the interviews. The findings presented here are those that I thought were significant and relevant based on a combination of direct and oblique references in the survey and interviews.

Causes of Conflict

Table 6.1 compares the causes of conflict reported by the participating junior high students to those causes reported by selected researchers. Lippitt was selected as the sole

Table 6.1

A Comparison of Causes of Conflict in the Present Study With Those Identified by Other Researchers in Educational and Non-educational Settings

Cause	Researcher									Frequency of Mention
	Educational Settings								Non-educ. Settings	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Communication failure misunderstanding	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	8
Value & fairness issues	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	8
Noncompliance with rules & policies, lack of cooperation	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	8
Authority issues	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	8
Frustration & irritability	x				x				x	3
Substandard performance, responsibility issues	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	7
Differences over methods	x	x	x	x	x				x	6
Personality issues	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	7
Inappropriate behavior, harassment	x		x		x					3
Gender issues	x		x							2
Unsolved prior conflicts	x							x		2
Academic matters		x	x							2
Organizational matters		x	x	x				x		4
Resources/personnel		x	x					x		3
Goal differences					x			x		2
Attacks on integrity			x		x			x		3
Competition for limited resources									x	1

Researchers: 1. Present study
2. Sekhon

3. Eiserman
4. Holder

5. Boyd
6. Hale et al.

7. Johnson et al.
8. Maurer

9. Lippitt

representative of researchers in non-educational settings because his list of causes was very comprehensive. For example, Deutsch's and Pondy's sources of conflict are included in Lippitt's list.

Many of the causes of conflict identified by students in this study parallel those found in the literature, as indicated by the frequency of their being mentioned on Table 6.1. There was close correspondence of the following causes: (a) communication issues, (b) value and fairness issues, (c) noncompliance with rules and policies, (d) authority issues, (e) substandard performance or responsibility issues, (f) differences over methods, and (g) personality issues. Findings corresponded closest to Eiserman's and Boyd's, which is not surprising, because some of the conflict situations described in their studies dealt with student-teacher interaction.

Frustration and irritability were identified as sources of conflict by students, primarily in reference to teachers' behaviors. Little support was located in the literature. The most frequently mentioned behavior described by students under this category was "being moody, having a bad day." This type of behavior simply may not be tolerated in the adult interactions that were the subject of many other studies.

Limited support was located for the cause "inappropriate behavior or harassment." This may be attributed to the reluctance of many people to discuss this topic. Youth probably have a more open attitude because harassment, including sexual harassment, is often discussed as part of the Health curriculum.

The issue of gender as described by students in this study was not identified in the surveyed literature. Eiserman's inclusion of gender issues was in relation to a paternalistic attitude or exclusion on the basis of gender; in this study it referred to the gender of the teacher as a determining factor in respect and in frequency of students' reporting of conflict incidents with male teachers. Although Jamieson and Thomas (1974) reported that students were less likely to be accommodative and more likely to be competitive with teachers who used more coercive power, they did not link this finding to

the gender of the teachers. Also, this finding was reported for high school to graduate level college students. My findings suggest that teachers' gender may be an important factor in determining students' involvement in conflict, as male teachers were highly over-represented in the critical incident conflict accounts. However, it is also possible that the frequency of reporting the involvement of male teachers in the critical incident accounts does not necessarily parallel the actual number of conflicts that occurred. There may not be a gender difference in the total number of conflicts that occurred, as opposed to the number reported. Support for the latter view can be found in some of the recent gender literature (for example, Thomas, 1993, p. 139-145) that claims that the number of male-initiated incidents of violence has been misrepresented, and, therefore, the assumption that males are more violent or prone to conflict is not valid.

Several causes of conflict identified in other studies were not found in the present study. Most of those were concerned with issues with which students would be very unlikely to be involved, for example, resources, personnel, and competition for limited resources.

Most Serious Types of Teacher-Student Conflict

As there were no comparable data located in the literature, the observations were based solely on the responses of students in this study. Violence in terms of grabbing, pushing or shoving appeared to be a significant issue for students. Although violence was mentioned in only 11% of the direct responses to the interview question, it was the subject of two critical incident stories. A possible explanation is that being involved in a violent incident, either as a direct participant or as an observer, is such a traumatic experience that it becomes memorable.

Initiation of Conflict

Information was not located in the literature regarding responsibility for initiating conflict. Although there were significant differences of opinion between interview and questionnaire respondents, results from both suggest that students and teachers must

share responsibility for initiating conflict. Therefore, both groups could consider whether their contribution can be justified in terms of contributing positively to the learning environment..

Intentional Involvement in Conflict

Intentional involvement was not addressed by any of the theorists or researchers included in this study.

Positive Outcomes of Conflict

The positive outcome students mentioned most frequently—an improved relationship by understanding one another and becoming closer—reflects the views of such authors as Lippitt (1982), and Margolis and Tewel (1988). Direct support for students' choices of "learn from it, avoid future conflict" comes from Johnson (1986), Schrumpf et al. (1991), and indirect reference was made by Thomas (1976), and Margolis and Tewel (1988). Solving of the problem was mentioned by Deutsch (1973), Lippitt (1982), and Margolis and Tewel (1988). In addition, several of the general statements made by other researchers could include students' responses. Therefore, there is considerable congruence between students' views and those expressed in the literature regarding positive outcomes of conflict.

Negative Outcomes of Conflict

Findings of this study lend support to the findings of Janz and Tjosvold (cited in Tjosvold, 1991), Schrumpf et al. (1991), and Margolis and Tewel (1988) regarding the negative outcomes of conflict in terms of emotional hurt, and effect upon relationships. Schrumpf et al. (1991) mentioned violence. Owens (1991) listed psychological withdrawal in the form of alienation, apathy, and indifference. Several interview respondents described situations in which students felt alienated and avoided interaction with a teacher following a conflict.

Continuation or escalation of conflict as described by students was not identified as an outcome in the literature; however, it is probable that students recognized that the

outcome of one conflict can become input for another conflict. This would be consistent with Thomas' (1976) process model of conflict in which there may be prolonged interaction between conflict participants as the behavior of one initiates a response from the other, which may in turn may stimulate a reaction from the first person. Two other specific outcomes mentioned by students—suspension, firing, or transfer, and interference with learning—could be included in general categories such as Lippitt's "diverts energy from the real task." In sum, there was considerable similarity between students' responses and the outcomes described in the literature.

Strategies for Dealing with Negative Conflict

Students were in agreement with the many theorists who claimed that conflict was pervasive. They recognized that it was virtually impossible to prevent all conflict that had negative consequences, and they made suggestions for both preventative action (for example, providing more assistance to students requesting help with assignments, listening to one another, behaving properly in the first place) and for management strategies for established conflict (for example, dealing with conflicts while they are minor).

This study did not thoroughly investigate strategies for managing conflicts because the question asked on the survey dealt with how negative conflict could be avoided. Therefore, the study did not directly address the question of how students and teachers typically attempt to manage conflicts. However, when the conflict incidents related by interviewees were examined in relation to Thomas' orientations to conflict, the following emerged:

Orientation	Teacher Responses	Student Responses
	n	n
Competitive (domination)	22	13
Accommodative (appeasement)	2	7
Collaborative (integration)	2	2
Sharing (compromise)	1	2
Avoidant (neglect)	2	2

Several of the conflicts elicited more than one orientation, because as the conflict unfolded, different responses were made during the one incident.

The actual and desired orientations described by students were found to be compatible with the conflict orientations described by Thomas. After comparing the findings of the questionnaire and interviews, it is clear there is a great difference between desired behavior and reality. On the survey, students stressed the importance of communication, of listening to students. They also suggested that teachers should treat students equally, be calm and polite, or ignore the situation. Teachers' actual responses described by interviewees indicated the competitive orientation was exhibited far more often than all other orientations combined. This indicates that teachers employed a controlling, dominating, interfering approach much more often than students thought was desirable or effective.

Interview descriptions also indicated the orientation students demonstrated most often was the competitive one. Appeasement was demonstrated approximately half as often. Competition, probably in the form of confrontation, is not compatible with students' suggestions to avoid behavior that contributed to the conflict by being calm, controlling one's temper. Appeasement may be only a temporary solution. The conflict remains; one or both participants have merely chosen to accede to the other.

The above situation raises questions regarding the role of choice and emotions in conflict.

Relationship of Power, Authority, Influence, and Conflict

The findings of this study are similar to those of Hocker and Wilmot, Glasser, and Jamieson and Thomas, in that students reported that they considered themselves to be at a considerable disadvantage in teacher-student conflicts, and when they were referred to the administrators for such conflict. However the findings that described the students' deliberate efforts to provoke the teacher's anger underscore the interdependence of the teacher and students when they are involved in a conflict. Hocker and Wilmot (1985)

stated that mutual influence was a prerequisite to conflict. The deliberate actions of students as described by both survey and interview respondents suggest that there is more of a balance in the influence relationship in the classroom than is often acknowledged. There has been a tendency to focus upon the formal authority that is attached to the position of the teacher, and to neglect acknowledging the power that students may have in neutralizing that formal power.

Recommendations

Because conflict between students and the teacher in the junior high classroom is inescapable, it is important for both students and teachers, but especially teachers because of their positions of authority, to recognize the possible positive outcomes and try to capitalize on conflict situations to maximize the benefits. For example, in the conflict situation described by Jill, she stated that she and the teacher had a much better relationship after the conflict because they had talked about the situation every day. Communication is a pivotal factor. If the teacher can recognize that a conflict represents an opportunity to communicate meaningfully with a student, it increases the potential for there being a positive outcome to the conflict. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers make a point of following up on conflicts by discussing the situations with the student(s) involved. Furthermore, the teacher may not be aware of all situations that students view as actual or potential sources of conflict. There may be value in scheduling some time several times a year for a general discussion with the class regarding the qualities and behaviors that both students and teachers value in the other, and those that they view to be potentially negative. The beginning of each reporting period would be a logical time to consider areas of conflict and possible changes.

Some negative outcomes are inevitable, given the emotional involvement of participants who are not in positions of equal authority. I believe that awareness is of vital importance in dealing with negative effects. If both teachers and students are aware of the behaviors which the other group views as being negatively connected to conflict,

they may be able to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in such behavior and choose whether they wish to risk initiating or escalating conflict. For example, yelling was viewed by both groups as a behavior that escalated conflict. If yelling could be more of a conscious decision rather than an impulsive reaction, the conflict participants would have more control over the direction and seriousness of the conflict. The planned discussion sessions described above would increase mutual awareness. Two additional strategies may have merit. First, the teacher could present a brief summary of the findings of the present study to students and ask them if they think those findings apply to their situation. This should facilitate discussion and allow students to present their views in a somewhat less personal situation that might not be as threatening to them. Secondly, the teacher could provide students with the opportunity to make comments and suggestions anonymously in writing. Many students would consider this format to be a safer way to make suggestions to a person in authority than speaking directly to the person.

Implications

Implications for Practice

In the themes that emerged in the students' responses to the survey and interview questions, I think there was sufficient agreement on some topics to warrant suggestions for both teachers and students. Accordingly, this section will extrapolate from the results the strategies that appear to be most appropriate in approaching teacher-student conflict.

Teachers. Conflict, discipline, and classroom management practices are interrelated. Therefore, when considering the practical implications, the suggestions for teachers in terms of avoiding or managing conflict situations, I believe it is appropriate to consider material from the related areas. Lovegrove, Lewis, Fall, and Lovegrove (1985) investigated pupils' perceptions of the disciplinary behavior of a good teacher. Although some of Lovegrove et al.'s recommendations were not addressed directly, that is, in the same terms in the present study, there is evidence of support for them in students' general

comments on the questionnaire and on the interview. In Lovegrove et al.'s study, the good teacher was described in these terms:

1. The good teacher clearly explains why certain types of behavior are not allowed. (This is consistent with the suggestion provided by Bies for providing accounts—explanations of behavior).
2. The teacher's explanation is based on the need to maintain an appropriate learning environment, rather than on the teacher's personal need, like being annoyed or finding it difficult to teach.
3. The teacher is consistent in dealing with students who misbehave. Misbehavior is not ignored.
4. The good teacher expresses his/her anger, but avoids screaming or swearing.
5. The teacher avoids harsh punishments; admonishments are done in private.
6. After a warning, misbehaving students are separated or isolated outside the classroom to prevent further disruption.
7. The teacher carefully identifies the misbehaving individual(s) and administers punishment only to that individual, not to the whole class.

The suggestions by Lovegrove et al. provide practical recommendations that address many of the concerns of students regarding teachers' behavior in contributing to conflict in the present study. My suggestions for teachers in addressing other concerns are:

1. Focus on providing opportunities for the teacher and students to communicate—listening to one another, and allowing students to explain or defend their positions. A student summarized this on her survey response:
I think that if there were a lot more communication between the students and teachers, and hearing both sides of the story, and less arguing and jumping to conclusions, there will be less conflicts. It all comes down to Communication!

The teacher may find it useful to have a specific action plan for discussing a conflict with students. For example, the teacher could use an outline similar to the following: (a) allow the student to explain his/her views regarding the situation, (b) present teacher's own views, (c) allow the student to present any further information or opinions, and (d) discuss ways of dealing with the conflict situation. This structure ensures that students and the teacher have equal opportunities to explain their views.

2. Results indicate the importance students attach to fair treatment. It is, therefore, strongly advised that teachers make every attempt to treat students fairly and equitably. Related to this is the students' concern that they receive a warning before being punished for misbehavior. This may be related to the finding that a considerable amount of student involvement in conflict is not perceived by them to be deliberate. It may be that students think that general guidelines may not be sufficient, that they should be informed of behaviors that the teacher considers inappropriate at the time of the confrontation, especially in view of the fact that they believe they did not choose to initiate the conflict. A possible verbal response by the teachers would be, "If you repeat that behavior, I will consider that you are deliberately disrupting the class, and we will have to discuss it under those terms. I suggest you consider carefully before repeating that behavior." This type of statement informs the student that the behavior is unacceptable and that if he/she repeats it, it will be viewed as intentionally initiating conflict.
3. Try to judge every situation independently. Students expressed strong negative feelings about teachers' making assumptions, particularly concerning the motives or guilt or innocence of students who had previously been in a similar conflict. For this reason, it is suggested that teachers examine the conflict incident(s) as objectively as possible, assigning responsibility

based on observable evidence rather than intuition or a student's reputation. Of course, if the teacher determines that the student has indeed been repeatedly involved, this may be taken into consideration when determining consequences.

4. If students' assessments of intentional involvement are accepted as being accurate, there are implications that arise for teachers. If teachers consider that approximately half of the conflict with students is unplanned, not designed to deliberately challenge or annoy the teacher, perhaps they could take account of this when responding to potential conflict situations.

Administrators. Implications for administrators are:

1. A recurring theme in student responses was their belief that they were disadvantaged in terms of influence, especially in instances in which the conflict had been referred to the administrator. This was connected to the communication theme in that students thought they were not given the opportunity to explain situations and that teachers and administrators did not listen to them. Whether this perceived inequality exists or not, it is probably advisable to adopt a policy, then establish a standard procedure by which both students and teachers have an opportunity to explain their sides of the issue. A procedure similar to the one previously outlined for the teacher's use in discussing a conflict with a student could be utilized by the principal. A suggested process is: (a) the person who referred the conflict to the principal would describe the situation, (b) the other conflict participant would respond, (c) each person would have a chance to provide clarification, (d) the principal would provide his/her views, (e) all parties would discuss possible resolution strategies, and (f) both the student and the teacher would be given an opportunity to comment on the agreed-upon course of action.

2. In the present system there is little opportunity for teacher-student conflict to be viewed in a positive manner. Administrators could facilitate the viewing of conflict as a positive force by reinforcing the idea that conflict is an opportunity to use communication to explore alternatives to a problem. They could model this attitude by mediating teacher-student conflicts in a manner that requires the conflict participants to express their views and to listen to the other's views.

Students. Implications for students are:

1. Many students expressed concern that they were being judged on previous behaviors, on their reputations, and they thought this was unfair. The reality of relationships, whether it is a business, educational, or personal setting, is that previous interaction with an individual is a determinant of how subsequent interactions proceed. Reputation does count. Therefore, it should be impressed upon students that their behavior does have consequences, perhaps not in terms of punishment, but in the manner it affects others' perceptions of them, and therefore determines to some extent how they are treated. Therefore, it is important that as much of a student's behavior as possible be determined by choice, not chance. An appropriate time to deal with this issue would be the regularly scheduled discussions described in the recommendations for teachers. Involving students in role playing based on short written scenarios may be an effective way of conveying the message without it appearing to be a lecture by the teacher.
2. Communication problems or misunderstanding were identified as important causes of conflict in terms of students' behavior as well as teachers' behavior. Therefore, there is a mutual responsibility to try to improve communication. Students should be made aware of the importance of listening, of avoiding

yelling, and generally attempting to determine what the other person is attempting to communicate.

Implications for Research

A significant limitation of the present research is that it presents the perspectives of only one group of participants in the conflict. Therefore, replication of the study using teachers or administrators as the subjects would be worthy of consideration. A comparison of the findings with those of the present study would present a more balanced view of the topic, a triangulation of perspectives.

A topic for further research that arose during the interviews was the effect of the gender of the teacher involved in the conflict situation. It would be interesting to determine if there is a relationship between the gender of the teacher and the orientation to managing conflict exhibited. Much has been written in the literature on gender regarding the manner in which males and females develop different attitudes and behaviors in accordance with sex-role stereotyping. This suggests a study to investigate the effect of gender on initiation of conflict, types of behavior in which the conflict participants engage, and strategies for managing the the conflict as mentioned above.

In delving into the literature on conflict, I noticed that many studies dealt with conflict management strategies employed by administrators and teachers when they were interacting with other adults. A useful addition to this literature might be a study of teachers' management strategies when dealing with students.

The generalizability of the findings could be increased if the study were replicated using samples of students from the seventh and eighth grades to determine if students in these grades have similar thoughts concerning teacher-student conflict as do ninth grade students. Also, a more accurate view of junior high school students' views would be obtained if the study were conducted in different locations, for example, schools which represent different socioeconomic levels, or different ethnic mixes.

I have concerns regarding the interview schedule. Two interview respondents related critical incidents that dealt with incidents they had heard from other students, but in which they had not actually participated or observed. Therefore, the trustworthiness of these data is suspect. It is suggested that interview respondents be limited to relating conflict incidents in which they actually participated or which they observed.

Concluding Remarks

As I reflect on the findings of the survey and questionnaire, and as comments made by interviewees keep intruding upon my thoughts, several issues arise which have not yet been considered. First is the issue of viewing conflict between teachers and students as a failure on the part of the teacher, a weakness in management skills, and something that could be avoided with more effort and skill. This view has traditionally been imposed upon teachers by administrators, and by teachers themselves, as the aspect of their professional ego that requires control over students and classroom interactions. If teachers and administrators were to view a certain amount of conflict as normal and inevitable and not consider it a threat to their professional competence, there may be an opportunity for conflict to become an agent for meaningful change.

The second issue that I wish to address is the conflict-handling orientation of avoidance which was described by Thomas as neglect. Although Thomas proposed that conflict was neither intrinsically good nor bad, avoidance is often viewed as being an unacceptable choice of strategy for teachers. Several of the conflict incidents reported in the interviews described situations in which the teacher's behavior appeared to be intrusive and impulsive when he/she intervened in a disagreement between students. The negative consequences of those conflict situations may have been less severe if the teachers had limited their involvement to observation and monitoring. The teachers may have been motivated by their belief that it was their right or duty to intervene, by their concern for the well-being of their students, or by the belief that adults must intervene because students are incapable of solving their own problems. Regardless of the motive,

the teacher's intervention either escalated the existing conflict or initiated another one. Admittedly, it is difficult to decide when intervention or avoidance is the appropriate strategy. I view avoidance then, not necessarily as counterproductive neglect, but as the judicious application of the teacher's professional judgment.

The next issue concerns my observation that some students very obviously made conscious choices, used their will, in deciding how they would behave, and whether they would get involved in a conflict. Other students had difficulty in recognizing, or perhaps accepting, that in most situations they were in control of their involvement.

I was surprised that students did not mention "not completing assignments" as a major source of teacher-student conflict. Students reported interpersonal relationship factors much more often. I suspect this may be a fundamental difference between the perspectives of teachers and students regarding causes of conflict. I think that many teachers believe that completing assignments is an essential responsibility for students, and failure to do so is related to behavior problems and ultimately leads to conflict between students and teachers. A study by Rutter et al. (1979) suggests a relationship between achievement and behavior. The study showed that "Schools that give more emphasis to academics have better behavioral outcomes" (cited in Gaddy, 1988, p. 502). Teachers' association of completing assignments with avoiding conflict does not appear to be shared by students.

The final issue involves the concept of thymos. I was struck by the number of comments that either directly stated or inferred that students were concerned with the effect of conflict on self-esteem, theirs and the teacher's. Hegel (cited in Fukuyama, 1992) explained that a basic desire of humans is:

to be recognized as a human being, that, is, as a being with a certain worth or dignity. . . . In addition, human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The propensity to invest the self with a certain value, and to demand recognition for that value, is what in today's popular language we would call 'self-esteem.' The propensity to feel self-esteem arises out of the part of the soul called thymos. It is like an innate human sense of justice. People believe that they have a

certain worth, and when other people treat them as though they are worth less than that, they experience the emotion of anger. (p. xvi)

I think that many of the conflicts reported by students resulted from threats to either students' or teachers' sense of self worth. I observed several instances of the other aspect of thymos, the innate sense of justice. Students who sensed that behaving in a certain manner would have a negative effect on the teacher and chose not to behave that way were exhibiting thymos.

I concur with Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Burnett (1992) when they conclude that "Classrooms need to become places where destructive conflicts are prevented and where constructive conflicts are structured, encouraged, and utilized to improve the quality of instruction and classroom life" (p. 13). Several conflict theorists were quoted in Chapter 2 as stating that conflict is to be expected whenever there is human interaction (Hocker & Wilmot, Bugenthal, Jandt & Gillette). Therefore, students and teachers who spend several hours a day in close interaction can definitely anticipate being involved in considerable conflict over the course of a year. Some of that conflict will have positive outcomes and some will have negative outcomes. It is neither possible nor desirable to eliminate all teacher-student conflict. What is desirable is that both groups recognize and attempt to understand the other's views on conflict.

Teacher-student interaction is very individualistic. Every classroom situation is unique. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that a single system or program could be expected to be effective in dealing with conflict. It would benefit teachers to inform themselves of student perceptions and preferences, and consider those in conjunction with their personal educational philosophy, administrative directives, and the theory and reality of classroom management when planning for and participating in teacher-student interaction in the classroom.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Teacher - Student Conflict**Background Data:**

Male _____ or Female _____

Age _____ years

Number of years in school, including this year and kindergarten _____

How many elementary schools did you attend? _____

How many junior high schools have you attended, including this one? _____

Questions on Conflict

Think of the times you have been involved in a conflict with a teacher or you have observed another student or students involved in a conflict with a teacher.

1. What do you think causes conflict between teachers and students at the junior high school level? List as many causes as you wish. Be as specific as possible.

Teacher's Behavior _____

Student's Behavior _____

Other _____

2. What kinds of student-teacher conflict are the most serious?

3. How do you decide what makes a conflict serious, that is, what criteria or guidelines do you use to decide what is serious and what is not serious?

4. Think about who usually starts student-teacher conflict. In ten instances of conflict, how many of the ten do you think would be started

by the student? _____ by the teacher _____ by something else? _____

5. A. Describe any good things (positive effects) that can happen as a result of a conflict occurring.

B. Describe any bad things (negative effects) that can happen as a result of a conflict occurring.

6. If the results of a conflict were negative, how could the conflict have been avoided

A. by the teacher? _____

B. by the student? _____

7. In ten instances of teacher-student conflict, in how many of the ten do you think the student takes part:

on purpose (intentionally) _____ or by accident, unplanned (unintentionally) _____?

8. Have you ever been sent to the principal's office because of a conflict with a teacher?

never _____ once _____ twice _____ more than twice _____

9. Is there anything else about student-teacher conflict you wish to comment upon?

Please use this space to do so.

Interview Schedule

1. Think about the causes of conflict between teachers and students at the junior high school level. Could you please describe some of the things that students do to cause this conflict. What are some of the things that teachers do that cause this conflict between students and teachers? Are there any outside things that occur that cause this conflict—things that are neither student nor teacher behavior?
2. In your opinion, what kinds of student-teacher conflict are the most serious?
3. How do you decide what makes a conflict serious, that is, what criteria or guidelines do you use to decide what is serious and what is not serious?
4. Who usually starts student-teacher conflict, that is, who is responsible for starting it?
What percentage of the time is the student responsible?
the teacher?
something else?
5. A. I would like you to now consider how often the student takes part in the conflict intentionally—on purpose. What percentage of the time do you think he/she takes part intentionally?
B. What do you think determines whether the student chooses to take part intentionally?
6. When I asked you if you would allow me to interview you, I informed you that I would be asking you to remember and describe a conflict between a teacher and a student that had occurred during your junior high years. Have you chosen an incident? Could you describe that incident now, please. Do you have another incident that you would like to relate?
7. If necessary, after the student's description, clarify if she/he was a participant or observer, who initiated the conflict, the outcomes. Check perception by rephrasing the incident in a manner such as, "The way I understand what you have told me is that . . . Is that correct?"

8. Think of the outcome(s) of this conflict in terms of their being positive or negative. What do you think are the positive outcomes for the student? What are the negative outcomes for the student? What are the positive outcomes for the teacher? What are the negative outcomes for the teacher?
9. Should the conflict have been avoided?
If it should, how could the conflict have been avoided?
10. Why did you choose this particular incident to describe?
11. What are your feelings or observations about the conflict now as you look back on it?
12. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Throw Away Questions:

1. What do you think about being sent to the principal because of a conflict with a teacher?
2. If you have been sent to the office, what caused it? Do you think the situation warranted your being sent to the principal? Explain please. What do you think about the fairness of the action?
3. If you have never been sent to the principal, does that mean that you have never been in conflict with a teacher? Why do you think you have never been sent to the principal?
4. Do you think that the types of conflict that junior high students get into with teachers are similar to or different from the student-teacher conflict in which elementary students are involved?
5. What kinds of things (actions, behaviors) cause a conflict between a student and a teacher to escalate (increase, get more serious)?

Thank student for the time and effort he/she put into the interview.

APPENDIX B

CORRESPONDENCE

9548 - 145 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5E 2J7
January 27, 1995

Dear Parents:

My name is Maureen Osinchuk. I am a teacher employed by _____ who is currently on leave to attend the University of Alberta. As part of the requirements for my thesis for a master's degree, I am conducting a study on the causes of student-teacher conflict from the perspective of students.

There is considerable information available concerning conflict in the classroom from the point of view of adults—teachers, principals, and outside observers. However, there is very little that represents students' views. It is for this reason that I wish to ask students for their perceptions.

I plan to interview students as part of the study. However, before the actual study is undertaken, I need to test my interview questions to determine if they are satisfactory. Therefore, I am requesting that you allow your son/daughter to be interviewed by me for the pilot study. Your child will also be asked for his/her permission. The information received will be dealt with in a confidential manner. The interview questions are phrased in such a way that responses may be given in general terms; students are not asked to identify either students or teachers. The interview would be conducted at _____ School and would take a maximum of 30 minutes.

If you are willing to allow your son/daughter to be interviewed, please complete the following permission form and return it in the envelope provided to the general office of _____ School. If you or your son/daughter decide he/she does not wish to participate, he/she may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please contact me at _____.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Maureen Osinchuk

PARENT'S PERMISSION FORM

I give permission for Maureen Osinchuk to include my son/daughter, _____, in the interview for the research project described above.

(Signature of Parent or Guardian)

(Date)

STUDENT'S PERMISSION FORM

I, _____, give permission for Maureen Osinchuk to interview me for the research study as described above.

(Signature of Student)

(Date)

9548 145 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5E 2J7
March 7, 1995

Dear Parents:

My name is Maureen Osinchuk. I am a teacher employed by _____ who is currently on leave from _____ School to attend the University of Alberta. As part of the requirements for my thesis for a master's degree, I am conducting a study on the causes of student-teacher conflict from the perspective of students. The ethics review for this proposal has been approved by the University of Alberta, and _____ Schools has also approved the study.

There is considerable information available concerning conflict in the classroom from the point of view of adults—teachers, principals, and outside observers. However, there is very little that represents students' views. It is for this reason that I wish to ask students for their perceptions.

I plan to administer a survey questionnaire to 60 ninth-grade students. I would like to include your son or daughter in the study. Your child will also be asked for his/her permission. The survey will be completed anonymously, and results will generally be presented as group responses such as, "Five students identified _____ as a cause of conflict." Information that might identify a specific student or teacher will not be included.

If you are willing to allow your son/daughter to participate in this study, please complete the following permission form and return it to the general office at _____ School by March 16, 1995. If you or your son/daughter decide he/she does not wish to participate, he/she may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please contact me by leaving a message at _____ and I will return your call.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Maureen Osinchuk

PARENT'S PERMISSION FORM

I give permission for Maureen Osinchuk to include my son/daughter, _____, in the research project described above.

(Signature of Parent or Guardian)

(Date)

STUDENT'S PERMISSION FORM

I, _____, give permission for Maureen Osinchuk to include me in the research study as described above.

(Signature of Student)

(Date)

APPENDIX C**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Table C1
Age of Survey Respondents in Years

	13	14	15	16
Male		17	8	1
Female	2	32	12	1
Total	2	49	20	2

Table C2
Respondents' Years in School

	9	10	11	12
Male	1	22	3	0
Female	4	38	4	1
Total	5	60	7	1

Table C3
Number of Schools Attended by Survey Respondents

	Elementary Schools				Junior High Schools			
	1	2	3	>3	1	2	3	4
Source:								
Male	13	7	2	4	22	4	0	0
Female	29	5	7	6	38	5	3	1
Total	42	12	9	10	60	9	3	1